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with grateful Recollections

and kindest Regards

from his Early Friend

The Author.

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THE

CHRISTIAN'S MONITOR.

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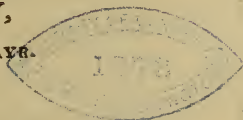
THE
CHRISTIAN'S MONITOR:

OR
Discourses,

CHIEFLY INTENDED

TO ILLUSTRATE AND RECOMMEND SCRIPTURE
PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE.

17
BY WILLIAM SCHAW,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, Ayr.



False religion in all ages hates the light, and supports herself by persecution, not by instruction: while the real truth as it is in Jesus always *comes to the light of Scripture*, and exhibits that light plainly to the world by reading and expounding the Sacred Volume, whence alone she derives her authority.—*Milner*.

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1821.

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P R E F A C E.

THE author is aware that religious publications are not the most suited to the prevailing taste of the age, but of this *one thing* he is fully persuaded, that when founded on the word of God, and illustrative of its high origin and sacred contents, they are the best calculated to promote both the present and the future welfare of mankind. At a time when the spirit of infidelity is bold and daring—when blasphemous errors are published and industriously circulated in various parts of the kingdom—when the dangerous tenets and superstitions of Popery seem also to be spreading around us, it becomes a season-

able and important duty, to use all proper means of counteracting their baneful influence, and of arresting their alarming progress. It is not his purpose, in this small volume, to enter the field of controversy—to attempt any elaborate discussion of the authority and evidences of divine revelation, or of the grand peculiar doctrines of Christianity ; though his abilities were equal to the task, this, having been so successfully accomplished by not a few eminent for genius, talent, learning, and piety, whose celebrated works are well known to the religious public, he would deem, at present, altogether unnecessary. His intention is plainly to show the general practical application of these truths, and particularly to hold up prominently to view the leading principles by which Protestants are distinguished—that the Holy Scripture is the only standard, according to which the sentiments of every man ought to be formed, and his conduct regulated ; and that it is his indispensable duty to exercise the right of private judgment, to

examine and to decide for himself, in all matters of faith and practice.

The following Discourses were composed, and preached in the ordinary course of the author's ministry, at considerable intervals; and this may account for any slight coincidence of thought or expression which may occasionally occur, and which he was not exceedingly anxious to avoid, because he considered it not improper, if it served more fully to illustrate to the understanding, or more deeply to impress on the heart, any of the important and interesting truths which were designed to pervade them. They are selected, not in order to form any systematic arrangement of doctrines or of precepts, but in a miscellaneous manner, to elucidate the great principles which are absolutely necessary to the constitution of the Christian character—principles essential to all that is valuable in piety and in virtue; also to recommend the Christian religion by exhibiting its truth, and the happiness of those who sincerely believe it. If their publication should prove the means

of rendering the Scriptures more highly esteemed, and more diligently improved by his readers in general, and particularly by the members of his own congregation, for whose benefit they were originally intended—of exciting among them a spirit of religious inquiry—of instructing the ignorant—of encouraging the timid—of establishing the wavering—of affording them any assistance in contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints—in giving a reason of their hope—and in adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things—the ends which he had in view will be accomplished. For these important purposes, it is his sincere and earnest prayer unto the “Father of lights,” that the perusal of them may be accompanied by the teaching of the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation.”

AYR, *Sept.* 1, 1821.

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DISCOURSE I.

ON THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO PROVE THEIR
PRINCIPLES, PROFESSION, AND CONDUCT.

1 THESS. i. 21.

“ Prove all things.”

PART I.

THE land in which we live has been distinguished by the name of Christian; and, indeed, among its inhabitants, there is, in general, a profession of Christianity. Amidst all the diversity of rank, talent, station, and occupation—of private sentiment and public conduct, there are comparatively few but unite in claiming an external connexion with some church or association of Christians. There is, however, considering them even in this light, to be seen a striking contrast of character. Some there are who seem to be entire strangers to the exercise of reason in matters of religion; being born, bap-

tized, and educated in the bosom of a church, without thought or reflection, assume the profession of which their fathers have set them the example. But there are others who boast of their freedom of inquiry, are fond of innovation, who sound the alarm against all ancient systems, as if, founded in ignorance, and reared by superstition, they must totter and fall into ruin—who have dared to avow that the Scriptures themselves do not contain the grand peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and, with lawless criticism, by false and presumptuous reasoning, divest them of all their glory and all their suitableness as a revelation of the gracious purpose of God to the fallen children of men. It becomes therefore proper and necessary to warn you against both of these extremes. Beware of being mere simpletons in religion; believing as others have done, whose character you admire, or whose memory you venerate, without examining into the grounds of your faith. Be equally on your guard, lest you do homage to a pride of understanding, or follow the impulse of your own unhallowed passions, instead of obeying the dictates of the Holy Spirit of God. Seriously attend to the exhortation of the Apostle, “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

“Prove all things.” This exhortation is so extensive in its application as plainly to intimate, that there is nothing we ought to receive as a principle of faith, or a rule of conduct, which we have not previously examined and found to be good. Implicit faith is unworthy of the man, for it is acting

beneath the dignity of our rational nature ; it is unworthy of the Christian, for it is a faith without evidence, deserves not the name, and, like “ the hypocrite’s hope, shall perish.”

You will easily perceive, my brethren, that this subject is of the first importance, and in which you ought to feel the deepest interest. By bestowing on it that devout and earnest attention which it merits, it will be useful, by the blessing of God, in rousing you to activity and diligence in examining into the grounds of your religious belief—in fortifying you against the attacks of those enemies who are labouring to destroy the foundation of your hope—in teaching you to escape the artifices by which the ignorant and unwary are often deceived—and enabling you “ earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” It will at least be a source of satisfaction to your own minds, that you have maturely considered the subject, and have attained the conviction that you are Christians, not from accident—the prejudices of education—compliance with custom—the influence of example—but because you have rational evidence of the truth of your creed and confession, and “ know the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed.”

In the illustration of this subject, I shall *first* mention a few of those things which you ought to prove ; and, *secondly*, point out some of the advantages resulting from this proof, which should operate as motives to the practice of the duty.

I. I shall mention a few of those things which you ought to prove.

“ Prove *all things*.” What a great multitude of particulars are here included ! It would be equally tedious and difficult to enumerate them, nor is this necessary ; all that is here proposed, is to select a few of the most important and interesting.

1. Prove the Scriptures to be the word of God.

Be not surprised, my brethren, when you are called to prove the Scriptures ; for though they are the standard or test by which all matters respecting religion and morals ought to be tried, you are not required to receive them as a communication from heaven without evidence. Has not their inspiration been denied by deists in every age ? and if you receive them as the word of God, without examination, without proof, what better are you, notwithstanding your superior advantages or boasted professions, than the Brahmin, who claims the Shaster for his Bible ; or the Musselman, who takes the Koran for his Bible ?

The province of reason in matters of religion, ought to be carefully ascertained by us, and properly guarded, that we may wipe off the foul calumny that hath been thrown upon us by the enemies of our faith, that we take every thing for granted.— From our own experience, observation, and the history of all heathen nations, being fully convinced of the necessity of a supernatural revelation, to show to our guilty, miserable race, the only way of being restored to the divine favour, and to the enjoyment of

happiness, we ought to examine, with the utmost diligence and care, into the claims which this revelation hath to our belief. It is the legitimate exercise of reason to study the evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures. These are many and various ; and all that at present can be attempted, is merely to state the chief of them, to assist your recollection, and to afford materials for useful reflection.

The external evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures, are prophecy and miracles. The prophecies in the word of God are exceedingly numerous, and greatly diversified, and the exact accomplishment of many of them by past events, while it encourages the hope that the rest will be fulfilled in due time, irresistibly proves, that the book which contains them comes from the omniscient, the almighty Being, who knows the end from the beginning, and whose agency pervades all the movements of the natural and moral world, directs and overrules them for the development of his purposes. As the distinguishing character of divine revelation is the exhibition of a Saviour to sinners of the human race, you ought, in a particular manner, to examine those predictions or promises which relate to the incarnation, obedience, suffering, and glory of the Son of God, and to mark their accomplishment in Jesus, who was born of the virgin, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, expired upon a cross, and is now exalted to the throne of God. The force of this "great argument" has been so severely

felt by some of the adversaries of our religion, that they have boldly asserted, without the least shadow of proof; nay, in opposition to the clearest proof, even their most particular and exact fulfilment, that the prophecies were written after the events. But such a declaration, so unreasonable and presumptuous, can only be regarded as a striking acknowledgment, that the ground which they have taken is untenable, and therefore tends the more to confirm your faith in “the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy.”

To prophecy, let another external evidence of the inspiration of the Scriptures be added, namely, miracles. The revelation itself being supernatural, may be regarded, in its great and characteristic features, to be altogether miraculous. Behold the many wonders that God hath wrought, immediately by his own omnipotent arm, in behalf of Israel, his people, which loudly proclaimed that he had “chosen them for himself to show forth his praise”—that He, who was their King, was the sovereign of the universe—that he could suspend the laws of nature at his pleasure, that he could give them, and continue with them, the symbols of his peculiar presence—and that, while he concealed from them a glory that they could not behold without being overwhelmed, favoured them, at the same time, with such signs of it as were well calculated to strike the senses, and to impress the mind with solemn awe and reverence of his majesty. Moses, with his wonder-working rod, showed that Jehovah was with

him. Other prophets performed miracles by the power of God, and in like manner the apostles, in confirmation of the truth of their doctrine and mission. Thus, the principal writers of the Scriptures carried along with them sufficient attestations of their divine commission, and clearly manifested that they derived their communications from heaven. But, above all, the novelty, the variety, the benignity, and the grandeur of our Saviour's miracles, which he performed, not as an instrument in the hand of his Father, but by his own almighty power, fully proved him to be the true Messiah, and the Son of God, and therefore the book, the peculiar glory of which is to reveal him, to be the word of God.

The combined evidence of prophecy and miracles should first be examined, and being satisfied that they are amply sufficient to prove the Scriptures to be a divine communication to us, we are then to endeavour to ascertain their meaning, and are bound to believe the doctrines and precepts which they contain, though they should not be conformable to the dictates of our imperfect fallen reason, or depraved inclinations.

But, though the writers of the Scriptures were inspired, under infallible direction; though not only the sentiments, but the words, were dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, which were necessary to their being most proper and expressive, necessary to that accuracy and perfection which we have reason to

expect in a communication from God—though the original writings were thus perfect and infallible, yet it is possible that mistakes might have crept in, through the carelessness of transcribers, or errors been introduced by evil designing men, to favour the creed or the conduct of impostors: It is also possible that they might have been lost amidst the wrecks of time, or so mutilated as to be unfit to serve the purposes for which they were designed. But the watchful care of providence, in their preservation, whilst many thousand volumes, of less ancient date, are entirely destroyed—his employing men to transcribe them with the utmost fidelity, though not immediately under that impulse of the Spirit which peculiarly belonged to the original writers—and his transmitting them to us, in that purity and completeness which they still evidently possess, are not the least of those wonderful circumstances which corroborate the more direct proofs of their divine origin. If, however, we could find in them any positive and palpable contradictions, any atheistical principle taught, or obvious immorality sanctioned, that the light of nature itself is sufficient to discover, these parts, notwithstanding the external evidence with which the whole is supported, we would be obliged to reject as a communication from God, to consider as introduced by erring or wicked men; and this rejection would go far to invalidate the high authority of the rest, for it would be left entirely to ourselves to judge what is true

and what is false, to distinguish between what is human and what is divine. But there is no such invasion made by the daring hand of imposition on the sacred Scriptures, which would degrade them from the pre-eminent rank they deservedly hold as the perfect standard of truth and duty, and thus would frustrate the infinitely important ends for which they were originally intended, because their internal evidence exactly corresponds with the external, and, when united, form a most complete proof of their inspiration.

What do the Scriptures contain? Are there not many mysteries in them, which the reason of man could never have discovered, and even when revealed, is utterly unable to comprehend? This, however, instead of being an objection against their inspiration, as some have zealously contended, is rather an argument for it; for surely it could not have entered into the heart of man to conceive them. How then could they be revealed to us, but by Him "whose thoughts are not as our thoughts?" And if these doctrines be incomprehensible to us, how can we judge of them, and say that they are contrary to reason? The purity of the Scriptural system of morals is altogether unrivalled, which plainly demonstrates that it is one of those good and perfect gifts which came down from "the Father of lights." The important purposes that the word of God serves, even to exalt his glory in the highest; to humble the pride of man; to display the riches of sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners; the sim-

plicity, perspicuity, beauty and sublimity of its style; the connexion and harmony of all its parts; the wonderful power that it possesses, when accompanied by the Spirit, for enlightening the eyes of the blinded understanding, for making wise the simple, for changing the temper of the most obdurate sinner, for rejoicing the heart of the most feeble and dejected saint, all concur in exhibiting irrefragable proofs that “the law of the Lord is perfect,” that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” It was a saying of a man of great literary eminence, which well deserves to be remembered, “I have regularly and attentively read the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that the volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed*.”

Being satisfied with the accumulated evidence which the Scriptures afford, that they are the word of God, you are to exercise your reason, in endeavouring to ascertain their meaning, by “comparing spiritual things with spiritual;” and by availing yourselves of every other aid within the compass of

* Sir William Jones.

your power. Those who are acquainted with the original languages, are doubtless more qualified than others, for examining the various readings of different passages, with a view to determine what is the true reading, and its signification, and, for these purposes, can consult the critical works of the learned, which are sealed to many ; but it is a great consolation to the plain illiterate Christian, that none of those readings, in the smallest degree, affect any of the leading doctrines or precepts contained in our excellent and unrivalled translation.

Whilst you ought to exercise your reason, in endeavouring to ascertain what is the true meaning of Scripture, you are not to reject doctrines or facts because your understanding may not be able to comprehend them, or because questions may be proposed concerning them, which you are unable to solve, and receive those only which seem to be plain and easily understood ; but you are to receive both, on the testimony of God, who cannot lie ; for if we receive “ the witness of man, the witness of God is greater.” It is not the province of reason to pronounce judgment on the truth or falsehood of what is contained in the Scriptures, according to our own conceptions of what is right, for this would be to erect the authority of our own reason, weak and depraved as it is, above that of revelation, to render void the external evidences with which they are supported, to reduce them to a level with human compositions, and thus to cast them down from their excellency,

as the only standard by which we are to judge of every matter of faith or of practice*.

* It is the legitimate province of reason to mark the necessary consequences, or to deduce proper conclusions, from the doctrines or facts stated in the word of God. And it is an excellent rule for the interpretation of Scripture, which ought to be observed, that we are not to make difficult passages speak a language, or infer from them any doctrine, different from what is contained in other passages which are plain and easy to be understood. On the contrary, we ought to employ these as a key for opening up those which are more intricate or perplexed. An example occurs, which I here introduce, not merely for the illustration of this single point, but because it bears on the subject before us. It is written, 2 Pet. 1. 20.—“No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” From this passage the Roman Catholics maintain, that the laity or illiterate, are not to read or study the Scriptures for themselves, but ought implicitly to receive them according to the interpretations of Priests, of Councils, or of Popes. Were this conclusion admitted, what would be the consequence? “Our faith would stand in the wisdom of men, and not in the power of God.” But the duty of every Christian to search the Scriptures for himself, is plainly inculcated in several passages.—John v. 39. Mark iv. 24. 1 Cor. x. 15. 1 John iv. 1. And the Jews at Berea are recommended as more noble, more candid and open to conviction, than those at Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, whether the things spoken by the Apostles were agreeable to the word of inspiration, which they had received, and in which they were previously instructed, Acts xvii. 11. Whatever, therefore, be the precise meaning of the difficult passage to which we have referred, it must be different from that which has been stated, for it cannot be supposed to favour a tenet which would be subversive of a plain, fundamental precept of Christianity. Whilst we are to exercise our reason to ascertain what are the grand and leading principles clearly taught in the Scriptures, we are, in no instance, to draw, in opposition to them, any conclusion from obscure passages. Having proved the Scriptures to be the word of

2. Prove the principles which, as Christians, you profess.

You profess to be friends of the reformation from

God, they must be consistent with themselves, and we are to prove all things by this infallible standard.

It is, no doubt, an important step gained, to be able to demonstrate, that a difficult passage of Scripture cannot be brought forward to support the peculiar tenets of a party, without contradicting many plain passages; we are not, however, to rest satisfied with a negative interpretation, but ought to endeavour to ascertain positively what is its true signification. For this purpose, it is a good rule to be followed, that we study first to understand what is the most obvious and usual meaning of the words, viewed in connexion with the context. Thus, for instance, in the passage formerly quoted, (2 Pet. i. 20.) although it is foreign to my present purpose to enter at large into any critical discussion of it, it may not be improper to state, that the words, "private interpretation," which create the principal difficulty, ought to be particularly examined, in order to ascertain their meaning. The word "*ἰδιαις*," in the original, rendered private, properly signifies, *of one's own*, and "*ἐπιλυσεως*," has been by some translated, *incitation* or *suggestion*, and by others, *interpretation*. By writers of respectable authority, it is to be found used in both senses. Agreeably to the first of these versions, the meaning will be, that no prophecy of Scripture is according to the private views or suggestions of the sacred penmen—it did not proceed from their own invention, judgment, or feelings; nor was this possible, for many of the prophecies they did not understand at the very time they were committing them to writing. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. According to the other rendering of the word, which appears to be the most common, as in our translation, the meaning will be, that no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own explanation, opening up, or unfolding. As it proceeds from the inspiration of the divine Spirit, so its true sense must be made known to us by his teaching. He only perfectly understands his own words, and he only can make us properly to understand them. As the sentiments they express are not the offspring

Popery. You therefore declare, as the celebrated Chillingworth observed, “ that the Bible alone is the religion of a Protestant ;” that having examined the evidences of its inspiration, you received it as the word of God, and therefore you refuse to adopt human testimony, human tradition or decrees, as of equal authority with the Scripture. For this *alone* you have received as the infallible standard to which you appeal, by which you judge and decide in all matters of religion ; and therefore you testify against the idolatries, the errors and superstitions of the Romish church, as obviously contrary to it, and altogether subversive of its peculiar doctrines and precepts.

But it is an expression too indefinite for a church

of the human mind, a knowledge of them cannot be attained by the mere exercise of human faculties. This is a doctrine plainly taught in other passages of Scripture. 1 Pet. i. 12. 1 Cor. ii. 9—14. These two senses, which I have mentioned, are not inconsistent, but are closely connected ; the one seems to imply the other. The first, however, may be chiefly intended, being most obviously supported by the context. The object of the Apostle is to show that the Scriptures merit our greatest attention and most cordial reception, that we should bring to the study and improvement of them, a reverential and docile spirit, for it is a first principle, in which we should be firmly established, that they are not doubtful oracles, because in them God and not man speaks to us. It is essential to the very commencement of true knowledge, to be instructed that the faith we owe to the testimony of God, we are to give to what is declared by his prophets, because they dared not to speak any thing of themselves, but followed the impulse of the unerring Spirit as their guide. “ For the prophecy came not, in old time, by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

to use, that the Scriptures alone contain their principles, without further explanation ; for there is a great diversity, and even contrariety of sentiment, even among Protestants, with regard to some of the leading truths which they contain ; and thus, on this general ground, persons may professedly unite in one communion who are of the most discordant principles. It therefore becomes highly proper, and even necessary, that a church should explicitly state and publish what her sentiments are with respect to the great doctrines and precepts of the word of God. Confessions of Faith have accordingly obtained among the reformed churches. Those Confessions, however, are considered, not as inspired, or of equal authority with the word of God, but only as exhibitions to themselves and to the world, how they understand this infallible standard, that all may judge whether they are founded upon it, and whether they can conscientiously adopt them as the confession of their faith.

Now, what are the principles which you, as Christians, have adopted ? You profess to adhere to the subordinate standards, as they have been called, of the Church of Scotland, as containing your sentiments and belief with regard to the leading doctrines and precepts of Scripture, the form of worship, government, and discipline. This is your profession, when you become members of this church, and you especially who are parents have particularly and solemnly resolved, when you dedicated your children to God in baptism, to ad-

here to these principles. Is it right, then, in any of you, to make this profession before you have carefully and maturely examined, whether they be agreeable to the word of God? How unreasonable and foolish is it in any man to profess a system of religious principles, the truth of which he has never proved, and which he does not know on proper evidence whether they be scriptural or not! Far be it from me to cherish a spirit of party or of faction, to declaim against any denomination of Christians; but surely truth and propriety require that I should remind those who are members of this church, that you profess to have separated from the communion of the national church, for reasons that you deem satisfactory. But have you maturely examined them, and found them to be amply sufficient to justify your conduct? Are you fully convinced, that it is your duty to do all in your power, both by instruction and example, to maintain the right of the Christian people to elect their own pastors; to preserve purity of doctrine and discipline; to support consistency, in not deviating in practice from professed principles? You are not to rest satisfied with adopting the creed and testimony of your fathers in the Secession because their characters were respectable, or because the part which they acted was, on the whole, honourable and judicious; but you are to examine, and prove for yourselves, whether that creed or that testimony be supported by the Scriptures of truth. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not accord-

ing to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Some there are, it is to be feared, who have no other reason for remaining in the established church than that their forefathers, who were pious and good men, did so before them; and there are others who continue in the Secession church, precisely for the same reason. But is this either rational or scriptural? Is this proving all things? If our venerable ancestors had acted in this manner, should we not all, to this day, have been involved in the darkness of Popery? Religion is a personal concern, each hath an individual interest in it. The faith and the profession of others, however good, will not avail us unless we judge for ourselves, and make it our own faith and our own profession. We are to believe for ourselves, to profess for ourselves; and every one of us must give an account of himself to God, for the religious principles he hath adopted, and the religious profession he hath made. "It is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self, but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

3. Prove your profession of religion whether it be genuine or not.

It is certainly not a matter of small consequence to what denomination of Christians you belong, for it is your bounden duty to attach yourselves to that church whose professed principles, and corresponding practice, you are, after mature deliberation, fully persuaded in your own minds are most agreeable

to the word of God. This is the way in which you ought to walk, as best calculated to promote the happiness of your own souls, and the interests of truth and holiness in the world. It is not sufficient to affirm that you may be pious, and saved at last, in connexion with any Christian society. Who will deny that it is possible to be saved in communion with the Romish church? but will this prove that a secession from that church did not become absolutely necessary? If it do, then a sentence of condemnation must be pronounced on those celebrated reformers, to whose wise counsels, magnanimous exertions, and heroic sufferings, under Providence, we are indebted for the civil and religious liberty which we enjoy. But while we thus argue, at the same time we maintain that you may have a visible connexion with the purest church on earth, and yet not be true Christians; and if you depend for your acceptance with God, on the superior excellence of your external privileges, you have reason to draw an unfavourable conclusion with respect to your character. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that you try yourselves with regard to the sincerity of your profession. “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves, know you not your own selves that Christ Jesus is in you, except ye be reprobates.”

You may believe the Scriptures to be the word of God on rational evidence,—you may profess principles which you have proved to be agreeable to this standard,—you may make a profession of

this faith,—and your fellow-worshippers, judging from appearances, may esteem you as Christians of the first order, when you are really nothing but hypocrites in the sight of God. It is necessary to your profession of religion being genuine, that you have seen the evidence of the truth by “the demonstration of the Spirit,” and that you have experienced the transforming influence of his power on your hearts. This is a peculiar kind of evidence, which is most satisfactory and delightful to its happy possessor. The blind man, devoid of all learning and refinement, whose eyes our Lord opened, when interrogated by the Jewish Sanhedrim about the person who wrought the miracle, in opposition to all their sophistry and threats, insisted, with great firmness and consistency, and with much reason too, “this one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” In like manner, the most illiterate of the disciples of Jesus, whose mind is spiritually enlightened, and whose soul is effectually turned from the love and practice of sin, to his duty and his happiness, will despise a thousand subtle objections that may be urged against that gospel, which hath been the means of producing in him such a great and glorious change; and though the cross of Christ be “to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness,” yet with this experience of its saving energy, he will honour it in the midst of ridicule and contempt, as “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Though the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have ceased to be

communicated to the church, because they are now unnecessary, yet "he who believeth hath still the witness in himself." And whilst the Divine Spirit, by enlightening, sanctifying, strengthening, and comforting influences, witnesseth with his spirit, that he is a child of God, he can sooner doubt of his existence, than not be persuaded that the word by which "he is begotten again unto a lively hope," is indeed living and incorruptible. And there are seasons of urgent temptation and severe conflict, in which the most learned, as well as the most illiterate, will find this to be a source of their sweetest consolation and noblest support. It must, however, be admitted, that this glorious kind of evidence, like "the white stone in which there was a new name written, no man knows but he who hath received it." "Sceptics may wrangle," says an elegant writer, "and mockers may blaspheme, but the pious man knows, by evidence too sublime for their comprehension, that his affections are not misplaced, and that his hopes shall not be disappointed; by evidence which, to every sound mind, is fully satisfactory; but which, to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether overwhelming, irresistible, and divine *."

4. Prove your conduct.

"Let every man prove his own work." The principles of religion which you profess may be good, but if you habitually contradict them by

* Dr. Beattie.

your conduct, your profession is vain. There is a strong disposition in mankind to judge the character of their neighbours, while their own is suffered to pass without any severe scrutiny. This is an evil that cannot be too much reprobated, or too carefully avoided. It is your *own* conduct you ought chiefly to bring to the test, that you may decide your character. You are to judge whether your works of piety or of morality be conformable to the letter of the divine law ; for if they be not, though they may appear in your own eyes proper, expedient, or useful, they must be condemned, because it is not your own opinion that is the standard. The word of God you are, on every occasion, to take for “ a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path.”

You are also better qualified to judge of your own character than that of your neighbour ; for it is his conduct, and only a part of it, that can pass under your review : the principles from which it proceeds are concealed from you—you cannot trace the movements, or mark the distinguishing features of his soul. If his conversation be such as becometh the gospel, you are, according to the law of charity, bound to determine favourably of him, though your judgment cannot positively decide his character. It is not your province, to judge the heart of your brother, but you ought to judge your own. You are not to conclude that all is right with you, because your outward deportment may, in general, be such as the law of God requires ; for this is not

all that it requires; it is spiritual, extending to “the thoughts and intents of the heart.” It demands not only uprightness of external conduct, but also truth in the inward part—not only the worship of God in his ordinances, but love to God—not only deeds of justice and of charity to man, but love to man. Without this love, which is the fulfilling of the law, all your acts of devotion, however fervent and imposing, all your moral duties, however highly distinguished in the sight of men, are but splendid sins, and “an abomination to the Lord.” In proving your conduct, therefore, it becomes essentially necessary that you examine your hearts, that you may discover the leading principle or motive from which it proceeds, for this stamps its character. This is no easy exercise, nay, it is above the powers of unassisted nature, and, therefore, you ought to seek, by earnest and importunate prayer, the direction and aid of the divine Spirit. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins.” As the Scripture is the standard by which you are to judge of your own works; so the Spirit, by whom it was dictated, must be your guide, the great agent in making a faithful and correct application of it to yourselves. Self-examination therefore, when it is properly conducted, will always be accompanied with fervent supplication for divine assistance. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts,

and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto thee. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good, lead me unto the land of uprightness."

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE ADVANTAGES RESULTING TO CHRISTIANS
FROM PROVING THEIR PRINCIPLES, PROFESSION,
AND CONDUCT.

1 THESS. i. 21.

“ Prove all things.”

PART II.

II. HAVING, in the preceding discourse, considered a few of those things which Christians ought to prove, I proceed to point out some of the advantages resulting from this duty, which may be improved as motives to the practice of it.

First, it employs the faculties of the human mind on the most important and interesting of all subjects, and thus tends to promote their highest improvement.

Man is a rational, an accountable, an immortal creature. Can we learn this from contemplating him in his rudest state? In some barbarous countries, indeed, we see him so sunk in ignorance, brutality and vice, that we can scarcely observe in him the smallest traces of reason; the sum of all

he does is, to obey the call of appetite and the impulse of passion ; and thus seems to be only a very small degree removed from the inferior animals. He never thinks of the God who made him,—of the account he must render to the judge of all,—of that vast and awful eternity to which he is destined : never thinks whence he came, nor whither he is going. Is such a being composed of the same elements with the rest of human creatures ? Most certainly : for “ God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” How then can you account for his being so dissimilar to some of his species ? He wants the means of improvement that others enjoy,—the training of civilization—the polish of education—and, above all, the advantages which result from the discoveries of Christianity. But what is all the improvement that philosophy, science, and civilization can impart to human nature ? To appearance it is indeed great, so wonderfully great, that some men rise in the scale of intellect and of politeness, as far above others as these do above the irrational creation. After all their superior attainments, however, in the eye of the supreme and unerring judge of excellence, all that they have done is a mere waste of their faculties ; it is only the semblance of real improvement all that they have obtained ; for, if they have never employed their powers of reflection and reasoning on the Scripture, the most important and

interesting of all subjects have by them been entirely neglected.

But, my brethren, by examining into the evidences by which the inspiration of the Scriptures is supported—by proving the principles you have adopted to be agreeable to this unerring standard—by proving the truth and sincerity of your profession—by proving your conduct and your hearts, you employ the powers of your understanding in a manner becoming your rational and immortal nature, and worthy your high destiny. Thus, you not only rise above the untutored savage, but above the potentate of this world vain of his magnificence, and the refined philosopher towering in his pride; you derive a spiritual improvement to your faculties, a discernment and a taste, too pure and sublime for them to conceive.

It is well known, that the rough block of marble newly taken from the quarry, is of the same species of matter with the splendid pillars that support the spacious edifice. It is equally acknowledged that the powers of the mind are highly polished and improved by study. This wipes away the dust, rubs off the rust with which they are covered, and makes them shine forth for the ornament and benefit of society. But what are all other studies which may employ men of genius and taste, if they neglect the study of religion? what are all their works, which by many may be highly celebrated in their own age, and may afterwards erect a monument to their fame in the lite-

rary circles ? they are mere trifles, in so far as true dignity and lasting happiness are concerned, and are doomed ultimately to perish with “ the fashion of this world that passeth away.” Whatever, therefore, others do, let us be busy in that work which serves the grand purposes of our being, which promotes the highest improvement of our intellectual and moral powers, and, to our immortal honour, will be entered on the records of eternity.

Secondly, By proving all things, the most valuable and useful knowledge will be increased.

During the infancy of science, many theories were invented, to account both for the principles of human action, and the various phenomena in the universe. But men of wisdom at length arose, who were successful in showing the folly of such theories, and that nothing should be received as a discovery, or as an addition to our knowledge, but what could be supported by proper evidence, or brought to the test of experiment. Such theories, how ingenious soever they might be, were the very opposite of being useful, because they deceived the philosophical inquirer, and led him the farther astray from the temple of truth. In like manner, all conjectures in matters of religion, all speculations which are not supported by Scriptural evidence, may amuse the fancy, but cannot inform the judgment ; and, therefore, cannot be considered as any valuable attainment, but the more they are multiplied the more they involve in uncertainty and in error.

On the contrary, by proving all things, by submitting every article of faith, and every rule of practice, to the test of the word of God, you make sure advances in divine knowledge; and this is necessary to the gradual improvement of your character; for you cannot “grow in grace” if you do not “grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:” and how can you make progress in this knowledge if you do not search the Scriptures, for “they are they that testify of Christ.” If your knowledge of the word of God be very circumscribed and inaccurate, if you believe without evidence, and act without conviction of duty, your faith must be dead—your hope that of the hypocrite—your love spurious—the whole sentiments and feelings of your soul must be under a false direction, and your conduct marked with vanity and crime. It is, therefore, of infinite importance that you prove all things by the Scriptures, that you may add to the stock of true, practical, experimental knowledge; that you may live in the exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, and abound in every good work; that you may advance in the way that leads to everlasting happiness, “for it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”

Thirdly, By proving all things you establish your faith in the truth of Christianity.

The degree of our faith must be in proportion to the degree of our knowledge of the evidence by

which it is supported. If this knowledge be small, our faith cannot be great. Is it not very surprising to observe, how weak the faith of the true disciples of Christ was, even when they accompanied him on earth, and had frequent opportunities of hearing his divine discourses, of seeing his wonderful works? Doubts and fears seemed to be familiar to their minds, for which our Lord often found occasion to reprove them.

What was the cause of the weakness of their faith? The very imperfect knowledge which they had of their Saviour's divine nature and mission,—of his mediatorial character and offices—of the true spiritual nature of his kingdom. For we find, that after the Holy Spirit remarkably descended on them on the day of Pentecost, after the evidence of the truth was poured in upon their minds by a flood of light, their faith became firm; and it was not to be shaken by the most formidable opposition. If, therefore, you would be the true children of Abraham, if “you would not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but be strong in the faith, giving glory unto God,” prove all things: Study the character of God, as revealed in the Scriptures: Consider that he is “the Father of lights with whom there is no variableness nor the least shadow of turning”—that his love is unchangeable—his covenant is everlasting—his promises are faithful and sure. Study the evidences of the truth of Christianity in what your Saviour manifested himself to be in his doctrines,

predictions, and miracles : Contemplate his sufferings and his glory ; his life, his cross, and his crown. Pray for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, to give you increasing light with regard to those things that concern your eternal peace, that your souls may be confirmed, and that others may “ see the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.” What is the reason that so many Christians are weak and desponding, are perplexed and alarmed at every occurrence that may be disagreeable and painful to human nature ? It is because they are too much disposed to “ look at the things which are seen,” to give way to their feelings, and do not carefully examine the word of God, that contains so many “ exceeding great and precious promises,” so many consolatory truths, admirably suited to support them in every situation of distress and calamity. Let us therefore “ walk by faith and not by sight.”

Fourthly, By proving all things, you will be enabled to defend your faith against the attacks of adversaries.

Many are the enemies with which you are surrounded in this land of your pilgrimage. Some there are who even call in question the divine authority of the Scriptures ; others attack the Christian principles which you have embraced, and brand your profession with the cant names of enthusiasm, fanaticism, or hypocrisy. Whilst you ought to be grieved that such enemies to God and to mankind exist, and to pity them as most hostile to their own true

interests, you are not to be afraid of them, to prove cowards in your Master's cause, but to "stand fast in the faith, to quit yourselves like men, and be strong." You are to be always "ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." But how can you give a reason if you have never examined the evidences of the truth of Scripture, or the grounds of your religious profession; never examined into your own hearts, and found there the existence and operations of faith, hope, and love, and made these divine principles manifest to others by a devout, humble, holy, and heavenly conversation? If, therefore, you would not suffer the adversary to gain the advantage over you; if you would not discover the vulnerable parts of your character, and be a reproach to the Christian name and profession, let it be your constant study to "prove all things."

At our profession, infidels may blaspheme, fools may laugh, the profane may make themselves merry; earth and hell may collect their scattered forces, and combine their efforts against us, but we do not fear all that they can do. We call not to our aid the sword of the magistrate, the terrors of civil pains and penalties, or the violence of persecution; by such means the truth, as it is in Jesus, is not to be supported and propagated: "for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," but spiritual, "and mighty through God, to the pulling down the strong-holds" of impiety and vice, "to the casting down imagina-

tions, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." It is by the light of Scriptural argument that these hosts of darkness are to be scattered, by the force of truth that these enemies are to be overcome; and therefore let it be your daily study, that like brave and skilful soldiers of Jesus Christ, you may be enabled to wield these weapons with dexterity and ease, depending on the aid of the Almighty Spirit to crown your exertions with success. How can you reasonably expect this to be your happy attainment, unless you be "mighty in the Scriptures?" God, no doubt, can accomplish his purposes by weak instruments as well as by strong, he can save by few as well as by many, and this he hath sometimes done, to display more conspicuously the power of his own arm; but still we find, that in the ordinary course of his providence, he prepares and fits instruments for his service. The work of reformation from Popery, for instance, was accomplished by men of bold, independent minds—who were admirably qualified to think and to reason on the subjects in dispute—who refused to submit to human authority in matters of religion—but demanded proof from the word of God for every thing they were bound to believe and to profess; and thus, though the contest was severe and tedious, at last they rose triumphant above all opposition. And even in later times, the leading truths of Christianity have been defended by men of superior talent and acquirements, who have gained a

complete victory over their enemies: and if you would be able and successful defenders of the faith of Jesus, in your humble stations and circumstances, you are not to sit down in indolence, and believe, profess, and act, as others have done before you; but you are to be active, zealous, and persevering, in proving all things for yourselves, that you may be qualified to repel the attacks of your adversaries.

Fifthly, Proving all things will have a happy tendency to make you stedfast in your profession of religion.

It is readily admitted that a person may find good reason to change his profession of religion; this, however, is only on the ground of having previously examined and proved that profession which he formerly made not to be so agreeable to the word of God as the one he has embraced. But the man who is carried away by every novelty, and alters his profession with every change of circumstances, shows that he is altogether destitute of fixed principle. It is “the double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways:” he thinks one thing and professes another, because he has never proved what alone is worthy of his most steady pursuit. But the man who hath subjected his sentiments to the test of Scripture, and found them to be right, will be determined, in the strength of divine grace, not to change or renounce them. The same reasons that induced him to embrace these sentiments, operate in all their force to his firmly retaining them. Proving

all things is necessary to *holding fast* that which is good.

This invariable profession of the truth will impart true dignity to your character, will tend to promote your own improvement and the edification of others, to support the interests of religion, and to disp'ay the glory of God. What can reasonably be expected of those who have never examined into the truth of religious principle—have never inquired into the reasons of their professing Christianity at all, far less into the reasons of their connecting themselves with one denomination of Christians, in preference to another—who have never searched their own hearts, in order to discover what their true character is, but they will “be like children tossed about with every wind of doctrine?” If, therefore, you are desirous of “holding fast the profession of your faith without wavering, prove all things.”

Sixthly, Another advantage resulting from the duty of proving all things, is true peace and satisfaction of mind.

Nothing indeed can be of greater importance than this; for it is essential to your enjoying happiness amid all the trials and troubles of life, and in the prospect of every change, the most serious and alarming. We may proclaim our religious experience as we will, boast of our pleasant feelings—of our high and heavenly transports—but all is vain if they do not proceed from proper evidence of the truth. Have we not seen, have we not heard of, all

the apparent fervour of devotion, and even the most extravagant expressions of joy, flowing from a heart the seat of ignorance and of error?

Surely our judgments must first be informed, our understandings convinced of the truth as it is in Jesus, before our affections can be properly regulated. It is a plain and undeniable maxim which the Scripture contains, that all true peace and joy of heart are to be found only “in believing.” Now faith is always accompanied with true and saving knowledge. Without this, all religious experience is mere delusion, all pious joy is the transient glow of enthusiasm. If, therefore, you would guard against a stupid insensibility about spiritual and eternal objects on the one hand, and a presumptuous feeling of delight on the other, believe nothing without proof. Joy, no doubt, is the fruit of the Spirit, but it is so, because he convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; enlightens the mind in the knowledge of Christ, renovates the will, rectifies the conscience, sanctifies and exalts the affections: because he produces that faith which receives the only Saviour, as clearly exhibited and freely offered in the Gospel. “Whom having not seen we love, yea, though now we see him not, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Seventhly, The duty of proving all things is of the greatest advantage, because it is the way to our being prepared to give in our account with joy at the last day.

Our responsibility, considering the privileges we enjoy, and the professions we have made, is great and awful. It will be wise in us, therefore, to be frequently anticipating our appearance before that tribunal from which there is no appeal: "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Will all who have made a profession of religion, and even a flaming profession of it,—all who have displayed uncommon zeal for Christ and for his cause, and, in their own estimation, have made many exertions and great sacrifices for promoting it, be welcomed at last to the habitations of the just? Alas, no! For the faithful and true witness hath informed us, that "many shall say at that day, have we not prophesied in thy name, in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? But he will say unto them, I know you not; depart from me ye workers of iniquity." Such persons had never proved their principles to be right and good, or their profession to be genuine,—never proved their own hearts, or their own works; but had trusted in themselves, in their own performances, that they were righteous.

The danger of self-deception, in a matter of such vast consequence, must be inconceivably great. The loss of the soul who can calculate? It is immense; it is eternal! To this evil, tremendous as it is, surpassing the utmost stretch of imagination, all expose themselves who are "cumbered about many things," to the neglect of the "one thing

needful ;” who are at ease in Zion—lulled asleep under the soothing accents of the gospel—dreaming of present peace and future scenes of felicity and glory, but were never awake to their true situation, or to the contemplation of the awful realities of eternity. How dreadful beyond all conception, when their high hopes completely vanish, when their fair and flattering prospects flee away “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” and leave them sunk in the depths of irremediable wretchedness and woe ! Such persons neglected to improve the day of their merciful visitation, by carefully examining their principles, profession, and practice, by the unerring standard of truth. Would you not all wish to avoid misery, and to be happy at last ? Is it not most desirable to know, to be fully assured whether you have a well-founded expectation of immortality ? If so, before it be too late, be roused to activity, excited to diligence, in proving all things. Prove the Scriptures to be the word of God, your principles to be good, and your profession to be genuine ;—prove your hearts and your conduct, whether they are right in the sight of God. “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith ; prove your ownelves ; know you not your ownelves that Christ Jesus is in you. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure, by adding to your faith virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to god-

liness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall : for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

I shall now conclude with a short address to two classes of persons.

1. To those who are advanced in life, and for many years have made a profession of religion, I would say : Have you not had some experience of Christian feeling and of Christian enjoyment ?

Do you not recollect the time when you were awakened from your insensibility ; when you were first convinced of your guilt, and alarmed of your danger ? when the terrors of the law haunted you by night and by day ; when you could find no peace to your troubled soul, till you found Him who is the rest of the weary and heavy laden ? Have you not had some experience of waiting comfortably on God in his ordinances ; of being delighted with the preacher ; of rejoicing in the weekly return of the Sabbath, that you might again see the glory, and feel the love of Jesus in the sanctuary ? Have you not been sensible of making progress in spiritual knowledge, strength, and comfort ; of sometimes going on your way, through this wilderness, to the land of promise, rejoicing ? Have you not felt a zeal for promoting the glory of your God and the best interests of your brethren of mankind ; a divine impulse, by which you were irresist-

ibly led to pour out your souls to your Heavenly Father in prayer, and to exert yourselves, according to your abilities and circumstances, that the cause of religion and morality may prosper, both at home and abroad, and be speedily triumphant over infidelity, error, and every species of wickedness ?

But do not rest satisfied with mere feelings ; for you may be deceiving yourselves. Bring your experience of religion to the test. For there may be convictions of sin where there is no true conversion : Felix trembled at the preaching of Paul. There may be transient emotions of pleasure in hearing the word, when there is no genuine faith in the heart : Remember the stony-ground hearers, and even Herod, who heard John gladly. There may be great pretensions of zeal for God and for his cause, when there is no real love to God : Jehu said, “ come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts.” It is therefore of the highest importance to prove your experience of religion. Are any of you now become careless and indifferent about your own spiritual improvement ? Is the observance of divine ordinances become a great burden to you ; and are you never more at ease than when you are slumbering away your time in the house of prayer ? Are you now disposed to say, concerning the Lord’s day, “ O what a weariness is it ! when will it be over ?” Are you now become so familiar with the doctrines of the gospel, or with the preachers of it, that the charm of novelty is gone, and its excellence has no

longer any attractions for your hearts? Have you so frequently attended the church of God, that your devotions have become a cold and lifeless form? Are you now seated upon your lees, and feel no desire to employ the talents that still remain with you in the cause of Christ? Are you satisfying yourselves with what you have already done, as if your labours were finished, and that all future exertion must be left to others? If this be the case with any of you, where is the proof that your experiences have been such as will stand the day of trial?

But if you have the experience of true religion in the heart, you will know where you found peace to your guilty souls. Christ will be precious to you as your “rest and as your refreshing.” You will be bewailing that the “kindnesss of youth and the love of espousals” have so soon passed away; and you will be most earnestly desirous of their return. You will be more conscientious than ever, to wait on God in his ordinances, to behold his glory, and to rejoice in his goodness; amid all the diversity of your frames, and changes of feeling, you will be the more studious of living by faith on the word of truth; more humble, watchful, and circumspect in your conduct; more alive to the prosperity of the cause of Christ, more solicitous and diligent to transmit it pure and unadulterated to succeeding generations.

2. To you who are young, and have lately made a profession of religion, I would say, prove your experiences.

Your experience of religion has been short ; but surely if you be the true followers of Jesus, you will not be altogether destitute of a sense of the power of the truth on your hearts. The change produced in you is not so small and partial that it should have passed without notice or without feeling. Are you not grieved because of the follies and sins that have marked your former course ? Do you not lament that, too long, young as you are, you have been thoughtless of God, of your souls, of eternity ?—that vain amusements, and criminal pursuits, have too long engrossed your attention ?—that you have too long been flattered and deceived by the pleasures of sin, and the hopes of a seducing world ?

Are you not deeply convinced that “the time past of your lives should suffice,” and more than suffice you, “to have wrought the will of the flesh?” Are you not fully persuaded that you cannot too early devote yourselves to religion ?—that surely Christ, who loved you and gave himself for you, deserves the bloom of your youth, and the vigour of your manhood ? Are you not resolved, in his strength, to employ all your powers, all your time and opportunities, all that you now possess, and all that he shall bestow upon you, in his service ? Do you not take delight in secret prayer and meditation ? Are you not all attention, seriousness, and solemnity, when you come into the house of God, and wait upon him in the ordinances of his grace ? And have you not in view the promoting of his glory,

your own spiritual improvement, and the edification of others? To be thus exercised you have the most abundant encouragement. Your Lord is peculiarly kind, compassionate, and generous. Like an indulgent and affectionate parent, who shews singular tokens of love and regard unto the younger members of the family, he will cause you to taste the sweets of his love, and the pleasures of his service. The promise of God is, (and he never fails in the accomplishment of his promises,) “as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you :” There is here a peculiar tenderness in the allusion ; for a mother’s feelings, a mother only knows. Have you not already experienced the great, undeserved, and wonderful kindness of Jehovah towards you ? Do not, however, confide in your comfortable feelings, but trust in the faithful promise of a faithful God. Let your daily prayer be, “remember the word unto thy servants, on which thou hast caused us to hope.” O let your whole lives be a continued experiment with regard to religion in your souls ! Having begun the Christian course, go on, proving your hearts,—your sentiments,—your feelings,—your gifts,—your graces,—your temper,—your conduct, by growing in humility ; by activity and zeal in the service of your Saviour and Lord ; by abounding in watchfulness against all sin, in prayer, and in every good word and work.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE DEFENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE.

1 PETER iii. 15.

“ Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

PART III.

THIS precept was originally addressed to those early Christians who were scattered throughout many countries, and wandered as strangers among Jews or heathens, who were hostile to their faith and profession; it was therefore highly necessary for them to defend their religion against the attacks of adversaries, and to defend it in a manner becoming its spirit and tendency. And, my brethren, though we live in a land professedly Christian, and in these peaceful times of the gospel, are there not many among us, as ignorant of it, as averse to it, and

as offended at it, as if they dwelt “in a land of darkness, and the shadow of death?” Are there not some, in the present day, who are eager to represent the religion of Jesus Christ as a melancholy, irrational system; and those who are zealous in its profession, as the dupes of ignorance, or the friends of strife and fanaticism?

With a view to fortify your minds against such attacks, I have chosen this subject of discourse, and, in illustration of it, propose to direct your attention to the following exhortations.

Consider, my Christian friends, that the religion which you profess is most comfortable and cheering to the mind of man; that it is perfectly consistent with the principles of right reason; that, notwithstanding of this, it has been assaulted by many, and even by men professing the most enlightened and liberal sentiments; that when it is thus assaulted, you are especially called to stand forward in its defence, and to defend it in a manner honourable to your character, and becoming the spirit of your profession.

First, I would exhort you to consider that the Christian religion, which you believe and profess, is most comfortable and cheering to the mind of man.

It is a system which carries hope in its bosom, and brings hope into the heart of all who believe it. Man, though an immortal being, is by nature a sinner, exposed to the righteous vengeance of hea-

ven, and therefore, the religion which is suitable for him, must be such as affords not only possible, or even probable grounds of relief, but a certain expectation of deliverance from the wrath to come, and the enjoyment of eternal life. The gospel, accordingly, “brings glad tidings of great joy unto all people,” while it proclaims that to them “is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.” It reveals Jesus as the only hope of the guilty, because, as their surety, “he was delivered for their offences, and raised again for their justification;” thus it was clearly proved that “he finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, brought in an everlasting righteousness, and is become the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth.” Thus, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access unto that grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” It shows us at once the glorious object of hope, the heavenly inheritance, and the immutable foundation on which it rests, even the faithful promise of Jehovah,” in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” It informs us how this hope is produced in the heart of the fearful and unbelieving, and by whom it is cherished and brought to perfection. “The God of hope fills us with joy and peace in believing; and we abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost. It comes

to us from the Father of lights, through Christ the Mediator, and by the operation of the Spirit accompanying the word of promise. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." "Blessed, therefore, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for the saints." How is this accomplished? The love of God, which subdues enmity, and dispels fear, being shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost, there is a hope produced, a hope which maketh not ashamed. Thus, it is a glorious hope, for it shall not be disappointed; it shall be infallibly realized at the most fit and proper season, the time fixed by the only wise God; and shall be succeeded by enjoyment which will greatly surpass all anticipation, all that imagination itself can conceive. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what the Lord hath laid up for them that love him."

What so comfortable and cheering as the religion of Jesus, since it declares such glorious things concerning hope! Hope is the support and relish of life. It enlivens gratitude, confirms patience, gives wings to activity, a soul to courage, and perseverance

to exertion. What would human existence be without hope but a continued scene of indolence, of sadness, of despair? And what would the life of man be without the Gospel, that reveals his only hope of happiness? By this we are saved or preserved from sinking amidst the storm: let the winds and the waves rage, this hope we have as the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, fastened to that which is within the vail. "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

It is therefore most unjust to represent the Christian religion as unfriendly to man, as the nurse of melancholy, the harbinger of ruin. On the contrary, it is essentially necessary to his happiness. Joy and peace are to be found only in believing it. What the sun is to the world, the Gospel is to us. It enlightens, directs, cheers, warms, fructifies our souls. Any other system of religion, when compared with it, is like a transient gleam of lightning in a dark and stormy night, that shows the traveller he hath wandered from the right way, and at the same time discovers to him nothing but the abrupt rock, or awful precipice, over which he is every moment in danger of falling, to rise no more. How ought our souls to pity, and to pray for, the blinded Heathen, the deluded Mahomedan, the superstitious Papist, the atheistical Sceptic, who are involved in ignorance,

doubt and terror, “who are without God, and without hope in the world !” O that the day spring from on high may soon visit them, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness, and to guide their feet in the way of peace !”

Secondly, I would exhort you to consider, that the Christian religion, which you believe and profess, is perfectly consistent with the principles of right reason. It is therefore here supposed that it is capable of being defended on rational principles. “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a *reason* of the hope that is in you.”

Reason and revelation having the same God for their author, cannot really be inconsistent with, or contradictory to each other. But it has been strongly affirmed by many, that several parts of holy Scripture are contrary to reason, and therefore the whole of it cannot be received as given by inspiration of God. This has been the formidable objection of a numerous class of Deists, who have appeared in different ages. And what is the Socinian—the man who rejects the divinity of our Saviour, his substitution and atonement in the room of sinners, and other doctrines inseparably connected with these—but one who sacrifices to the idol reason, and vainly imagines that, under its patronage, he can defy and surmount all opposition? But though it be the sentiments of some, that many of the doctrines of the Gospel are irrational, it will not follow that they have proved them to be so: This they neither have done, nor can do.

That the Scripture contains doctrines infinitely beyond the grasp of human reason, must be acknowledged; but, that it contains doctrines contrary to right reason, must be denied. That truths are found in it, which reason, under the sway of corrupt inclination and passion, cannot approve, is admitted; and is not human reason now fallen from its original splendour and dignity? "Vain man would bewise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt." Were our reason perfect, like that of our first father in a state of innocence, which some have even the audacity to assert, objections of this kind would cease to be brought against the Gospel, for it would then appear to them in a very different light.

By the Scriptures we are not called to believe what is contrary to reason, nor even to understand what is above reason; but is it not acting a rational part, to believe the Gospel, since it is accompanied with all the evidence which any unprejudiced person could either wish or expect? The testimony of prophecy and of miracles in its favour, is such as to oblige the mind to assent to its truth. The purity of its morality stands unrivalled, and this has been acknowledged even by those who hate it; but the mysterious nature of its doctrines has given much offence to men "vainly puffed up with their fleshly minds." But why? is it unreasonable to suppose, that in the Gospel there are doctrines which surpass the comprehension of finite understandings? No: is it not most unreasonable to reject it on this ac-

count, since in this very respect, it bears an obvious analogy to the other works of God, in nature and in providence? It has been said, where mystery begins, religion ends; but, were this true, there could not be natural any more than revealed religion; nay, this would be subversive of all religion; for what more mysterious or incomprehensible than the eternity, the omnipresence, and other essential attributes of God, which must form the foundation of every religion that pretends to be capable of a rational defence.—The gospel plainly manifests itself to be reasonable to all who believe it. Though to such persons as the Greeks, pretending to the wisdom of this world, it is foolishness; to them who believe, it is “the wisdom of God.” The great apostle of the Gentiles is not ashamed to call it “the wisdom of God in a mystery:” and the angels of light, who excel in wisdom, desire to look into it, delight to contemplate it; and they account it not beneath their dignity, to be learning daily, by means of the church, “the manifold wisdom,” the varied display of the wisdom of God which it affords. The age, therefore, in which Christianity is generally contemned, may be denominated the age of reason; but the rejection of it is the greatest display of human folly and madness.

Thirdly, I would exhort you to consider, that though the gospel be both comfortable and rational, recommending itself to the understandings and the

hearts of all who believe, yet it is not surprising that it has been attacked by many, and even by men pretending to the most enlightened and liberal sentiments. It is implied in the text, that some will ask a reason of the hope that is in you ; will ask it, not for information, but with a view to ensnare you, and make you ashamed of your profession ; the questions which they propose, will bring a charge against your hope, that will render an *apology* or defence necessary*.

Christianity, from its commencement to the present day, has uniformly been opposed by its enemies, not because it is deficient in evidence, but because it is contrary to their favourite views, inclinations, and pursuits. “ They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” Thus the Sadducees, who denied a resurrection, the hope of the Christian, proposed a question to our Lord concerning the seven brethren, who were successively married to one woman ; which was, whose wife she would be at the resurrection ? Admiring their own ingenuity, they enjoyed only a momentary triumph, in supposing that their efforts had been completely successful in destroying the foundation of the Christian’s hope ; for our Lord, by showing that they were equally ignorant of natural and revealed religion, soon put them to confusion and silence. He said unto them, “ ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God†.”

* ἀπολογίαν. † Matt. xxii. 29.

Objections against Christianity, equally ridiculous and absurd with that here proposed by the Sadducees, who pretended to superior penetration and learning, have frequently, with an air of confidence, been brought forward by our modern infidels; but whatever be the character and form of these objections, the origin of them is to be found in the depravity of the human heart, which is diametrically opposite to the pure genius of the gospel. As opposite elements, in the material world, conflict with each other, so it is impossible that principles in the mind of man, which are contrary in their nature and tendency, can unite in their operations. But, “as it was in times past they that were after the flesh persecuted them that were after the spirit, even so it is now.” The reason is obvious. The conduct of the righteous who follow the dictates of the Spirit, is a practical condemnation of the conduct of the wicked. This they cannot bear, and therefore the pain it occasions, they are disposed by all means in their power, even the most unjust and oppressive, to remove. This is the true cause of persecution. As long as there exists an essential difference of character between the righteous and the wicked, the Christian may expect to have his principles and conduct attacked; and, think it not strange, attacked by men of genius, learning, and wit; by men professing the most liberal sentiments, and the most diffusive benevolence; because such persons have been, and such there still are,

who know not the Scriptures, the power, nor the grace of God. But let it be your care, that you have “ a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as evil doers, they may be ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

Fourthly, I would exhort you to consider, that you should be always prepared for the defence of the hope of the gospel. “ Be *ready* always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason,” or demands of you a defence “ of the hope that is in you.”

You may be branded by the enemies of religion as ignorant and fanatical, but show that you do not deserve such treatment, by being able to give a reason for what you believe and profess. You are now fully persuaded, that your hope is rational, therefore capable of being defended; and if you cannot perform this duty, something must be wanting in you, which you ought to labour to supply. Study carefully the many powerful arguments with which it is supported; consider each of them apart by itself; examine its individual strength, and its various bearings and relations; learn a facility of calling them all forth when necessary, and exhibiting them in their united force; thus you will be prepared to refute the objections of your adversaries, to “ put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Be ready *always* to give a reason of the hope that is in you. This does not mean, that you are to attempt to give an answer to every foolish, im-

pertinent question, respecting your religion, which may be asked you ; for this would frequently do more harm than good. It is an important injunction that ought to be particularly observed, “ answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him*.” There is a time to be silent, as well as a time to speak ; of this our Saviour, who is infallible in wisdom, hath set before us a most illustrious example. Often he remained silent, when questions were asked him by his adversaries ; avoided a direct answer, or called their attention to some subject more important and useful. This he did, not because he was unable to reply, but because he saw that, either to be mute, or to evade their inquiries, would serve a better purpose.

While, however, you are not always to attempt an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of your hope, be *ready*, if possible, to give it. If the question be ridiculous and absurd, be prepared to show its folly ; if specious and deceiving, to detect its fallacy ; if threatening and abusive, to display your superiority to such rudeness by unshaken intrepidity in the cause of God. For this purpose, you ought to make yourselves thoroughly acquainted with the nature and grounds of your hope, as stated in the word of God. Examine seriously if you are really made partakers of it, by tracing its operations in your own hearts, and the effects which it pro-

* Prov. xxvi. 4.

duces in your conduct. Thus you will be enabled to repel the charge of ignorance or delusion, which may be preferred against you.

Fifthly, I would exhort you to consider, that you ought to defend your hope in the spirit of meekness. “Be always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with *meekness*.”

The friends of the gospel have sometimes been stigmatized as ill-natured and contentious; and doubtless, their own spirit has too often intermingled with their zeal for God: but whilst true religion admits of honest and ardent zeal, it disclaims every malignant and angry passion. Christ Jesus, the author and substance of it, was meek and lowly, and we ought to learn of him meekness and humility. In defending your hope, Christian, whilst you deprecate a cold, lukewarm temper of mind, as altogether unsuitable to the importance of the subject, and the interest you ought to feel in it, at the same time carefully avoid “all malice, bitterness, and evil speaking.” Never forget that “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If you be desirous of doing good to your opponent, show him that you are not easily irritated, that you are slow to resent injuries, and ready to forgive. If you are persuaded that, through ignorance, he is mistaken, he deserves your pity, and not your hatred; and if you observe him open to conviction, by mingling sympathy with instruction, you may prove the happy instrument of communicating the truth

to his mind. But if he display a wilful perversity of disposition, a fixed determination to shut his eyes to the light, how clearly and strikingly soever it may shine around him, that he may indulge in the works of darkness ; whilst you feel indignant at such a deplorable spectacle, beware of casting off the meekness and gentleness of Christ ; for by this you would cease to act in character, make your good to be evil spoken of, and frustrate the grand design you ought to have in view. With perspicuity and force of reasoning, discover a meek benevolent spirit. Show it is not for your own honour, or that of a party, you contend ; but for the triumph of truth and of goodness over error and malevolence. If you are ambitious of being successful in convincing and persuading your adversary, you will do it most effectually by offices of love and kindness. Then he will be inclined to acknowledge you as a friend, and your arguments will come with a tenfold force. Your actions will plead for your sentiments, and be a presumptive proof of their excellence. But malignant sentiments of bigotry and party zeal, intemperate and reproachful language, as they are contrary to the mild and benignant genius of Christianity ; so they are not the most probable means of recommending the truth. Your arguments for it may be right, but you are weakening their power of doing good, by showing that you breathe not the spirit of that system you profess to support. “ Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,

bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And, above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

Sixthly, I would exhort you to consider, that you ought to defend your hope with fear;—with fear of dishonouring God or his cause, by the improper management of it. Be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in you with *fear*.

With *fear*, that is, with reverence, in opposition to levity. The subject is solemn and important, being connected with the welfare of the soul, with eternal consequences; and, therefore, you should beware of treating it in a light or careless manner. Some there are who seem to converse or argue on points of religion, with as much indifference as on the common news of the day, or the ordinary incidents of life, and with a levity altogether unbecoming their character and profession. This is highly criminal, and ought to be carefully avoided. When you are called to defend your hope, this is not the time for the display of your wit or humour; for raising the laugh of your audience, by your studied conceits, or unintentional blunders; but, as your arguments ought to be weighty, the mode of exhibiting them ought to be grave and serious. Thus you will show that you are ready to explain or to defend the subject in dispute, with an earnestness

suitable to the deep interest you feel in it, and with a reverence becoming its solemnity and importance. Never forget that the eye of the omniscient Jehovah is upon you—that he witnesseth the temper of mind you indulge,—will soon call you before his tribunal for the manner in which you have protected his cause; and a just impartial sentence will then be passed, from which there is no appeal. Such impressions will have a powerful tendency to check the risings of our own spirit, to cherish reverence and godly fear.

But if your opponent should be one who employs ridicule instead of argument, and exerts himself to afford amusement to others, at the expence of your character and profession, it will not be improper, for it is not inconsistent with that reverence which should habitually guide you in all your contendings for the truth, to turn, if possible, the edge of his weapon against himself. This may sometimes be the best manner of exposing the weakness or wickedness of his cause, and the vanity of his triumph. “We are to answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit*.” A memorable example of this we have in the manner in which the zealous Elijah held up to ridicule the prophets of Baal, and exposed the absurdity of their idolatry†.

With *fear*, that is, with caution, in opposition to temerity. The truth has often suffered by its

* Prov. xxvi. 5.

† 1 Kings xviii. 27.

professed friend, who is of a forward impetuous temper ; impatient of contradiction—whose passions lead his judgment—who speaks before he thinks. However laudable his intentions may be, such a man is better fitted to injure than to support a good cause ; for whatever other qualifications he may possess, he is destitute of ability for calm and steady investigation, which is so necessary to discern the force and bearings of arguments, and to deduce fair and legitimate conclusions. He who is cool and deliberate in forming his judgment, cautious and careful in determining the power of evidence on both sides of a question, has greatly the advantage over his antagonist, who, without previous examination, pronounces his assurance of being right, and, therefore, every person that differs from him is unworthy of being heard, being undoubtedly in the wrong. Beware, my friends, of a sottish or arrogant self-sufficiency. Be not enslaved by the tyranny of opinion. Be not rash in giving your judgment. Let your words be few, and your arguments well ordered. Let them occupy their proper time and place ; for it is “ the fool that uttereth all his mind, but the wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

With *fear*, that is, with modest diffidence, in opposition to presumptuous confidence.

There is a modesty which most frequently is the attendant of genius and talent, which, in the eye of

true discernment, imparts to them a peculiar lustre. For it shows that their possessor is not vain ; that notwithstanding his superior gifts and attainments, he is not insensible of his infirmities and imperfections ; and therefore has no pretensions to dazzle or confound those who, in many respects, are his inferiors. There is also a self-diffidence, arising from a deep and intimate knowledge of ourselves, which is a great ornament to the Christian character, and a great qualification to a defender of our faith and hope. Behold the man who, in contending for the truth, boasts not of his superior powers of understanding, or stores of information, or even of his superior strictness of principle or purity of morals ; but, under a deep sense of his own infirmities and liability to err, is afraid lest he should disgrace himself, or injure his cause, by uttering the language of arrogance and presumption. How amiable is such a character ! With what advantage does the truth appear in his hands, and how great the probability it will prevail ! Behold, on the contrary, the man elated by a consciousness of his great abilities, looks down with contempt on his antagonist ; pours forth great swelling words of vanity ; is much more powerful by the sound of his voice than by the strength of his reasoning ; shows his rage and madness, by denouncing as a weak or wicked heretic every one that differs from him, as if it was impossible *he* could be mistaken ; assumes the right of rashly and uncharitably passing judg-

ment upon others, as if he himself was infallible ! What forbidding and repulsive features does such a character exhibit ! Is not the cause of truth in his hands greatly disfigured, and is not every wise and reflecting mind disposed to flee from his arbitrary jurisdiction, his proud intolerant sway ? “ The wise man feareth and departeth from evil : but the fool rageth and is confident.”

This subject, my Christian friends, may be improved, by calling on you to examine yourselves if the gospel has been successful in producing true hope in your hearts. If you depend on your distinguished privileges, you will be lost for ever : if you neglect to improve them, they will aggravate your condemnation. What will it avail you to have heard of this hope, if it be not in your souls ? But if Christ be in you the hope of glory, he will be precious to you ; your desires will be towards him ; your affections will centre on him ; you will meditate day and night on the dignity of his person, the perfection of his righteousness, the suitableness of his offices, the virtue of his cross, the glory of his crown, and your meditation of him in all his characters, relations, and works, will be delightful to your souls. If you have this hope in you, you will be disposed not to grieve the holy spirit by whom it is produced, and by whom you are sealed unto the day of redemption ; you will be desirous to improve more and more the exceeding great and precious promises, which are the immutable foundation on

which it is built ; and your daily prayer will be, “ remember the word unto thy servants on which thou hast caused us to hope.”

Prove that this hope dwells in you, by delighting in holiness in all manner of conversation, and by labouring to promote its interests in the world. “ Having this hope in you, purify yourselves even as Christ is pure.” Believing the promises, “ dearly beloved, purify yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Improve your hope, by cherishing noble and heavenly desires ; by denying yourself the gratification of every sinful propensity, the pleasures of vain and criminal amusement, or even, of those innocent enjoyments which strongly tempt to exceed the bounds of reason and moderation, to make you forgetful of God and eternity. “ Gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that shall be given to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Thus let the light of your pure and heavenly example “ so shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your father who is in heaven,” and thus you will give evidence to yourselves and others, that “ Christ Jesus is in you the hope of glory.”

Study daily to hold fast the profession of your faith and hope. My Christian brethren, during your pilgrimage in this world, you are surrounded with a multitude of enemies who labour incessantly to disturb your peace, and, if possible, to ruin your

souls. Prompted by malice, they fail not to load your character with the foulest calumnies, whilst they exert their ingenuity, in representing the system you have embraced, as equally repugnant to the reason and the happiness of man. Amidst all their subtilty of plan, and violence of attack, you have abundant resources for your defence ; you have also “ strong consolation, in having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you.” Whilst you pity the blindness of their understandings, or the wickedness of their hearts ; whilst you tremble at their impending ruin and pray for their deliverance from it, all your duty is not performed. A regard to character, a love to truth, a zeal for the most important of all concerns, unite with the express authority of the great lawgiver, in calling on you to “ be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

It is not indeed to be expected that every sincere Christian is able to answer every question, or to repel every objection, that may be brought against his hope. His adversaries may possess superior ingenuity and address, may astonish him by the fluency of their language, may surprise him by the novelty, or silence him by the plausibility of their arguments, still he will not renounce his hope, and he hath good reason ; for he hath other and higher evidence for it than what they know, that spiritual assurance, that inward satisfaction, with “ which a stranger does not intermeddle ;” he hath felt its ex-

istence and its operations, hath experimental proof of its glory and power, by its happy effects on his heart and conduct; and therefore, whatever others may say or do, he is determined to hold it fast. He is fully convinced that it is his anchor, and if he throw it away at the suggestions of his foes, he will “make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.” “Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, that you may have great recompence of reward.” “Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for faithful is he who hath promised.” “Be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” “Be not weary in well doing; for in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not.”

Improve your hope, by rejoicing in it, amidst all the changes and calamities of life to which you are exposed. “When Alexander was about to undertake the conquest of Asia, he distributed his possessions among his friends. Some one observing the magnificence of his presents, asked him what he intended to retain for himself; he replied, *hope*. Christians, though in general little resembling, or little anxious to imitate the lords of this world, may justly adopt the language of the Grecian hero. They have engaged in an enterprise so great—they aspire to a kingdom so rich and glorious—that they can well afford to abandon to others the ordinary honours and gratifications of life. How should they exchange it for any worldly possession, or even con-

sent to share it with transient and perishable pleasures."—Your hope, O ye followers of Jesus, is your riches amidst all the poverty in your lot; it is your staff to support you in every step of your pilgrimage, your fortress that renders you impregnable to the attacks of every foe; your consolation in the season of sorrow; your song of triumph in the prospect of death and the grave. "Rejoice then in hope of the glory of God, and not only so, but glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience, and experience hope, that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto you."

In fine, I would address a few words to you who are *without hope*. Ah, what a deplorable situation is this! What! are you without hope, in the land of absolute despair? No: but you are without hope because there is no hope *in you*. "You are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." What a dismal portrait is this? But, unbelieving sinner, it is the true likeness of your character, for it is drawn by the unerring pencil of inspiration. You may pretend, profess what you will, but you have no solid foundation on which you build your confidence. Being destitute of an interest in Jesus Christ, you are without that hope which he alone can inspire. You may say you have hope, but it is unwarrantable presumption. You

may think you enjoy happiness, but it is mere delusion. I mean not to drive you to despair ; this would be cruel in the extreme. But my benevolent intention is, to make you sensible of your real situation ; of the danger to which you are exposed ; and to point out to you the *only* way of salvation. Be then convinced of your many and aggravated sins, be alarmed because of that dreadful vengeance which they deserve, and “ flee,” without delay, “ for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before you.” The gospel publishes the glad tidings that Christ Jesus is the almighty, the compassionate, the only Saviour. Through him alone it is that your iniquities can be forgiven, and deliverance obtained from the wrath to come. “ By this man,” even the man Christ Jesus, who is the mighty God, and the only Mēdiator, “ is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Believe, therefore, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be justified freely by the grace of God, “ according to the hope of eternal life.” Then that hope shall be in you, which shall never make you ashamed, but shall issue in the full enjoyment of God as your portion for ever and ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST, AND THE DUTY
OF HIS DISCIPLES NOT TO BE ASHAMED OF IT.

2 TIMOTHY i. 8.

“ Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord ”

PAUL, in his addresses to his son Timothy, breathes all the affection of a father. His instructions are communicated in such a gentle and persuasive manner, as had a tendency to touch the heart of this young preacher, to prepare him for receiving his admonitions in love, and to display their influence in his conduct. We find the Apostle accordingly, in the verses preceding the exhortation in the text, giving thanks “ to God, whom he served with a pure conscience, that without ceasing, he had remembrance of Timothy in his prayers night and day ; that he was mindful of his tears of god-

ly sorrow ; of the unfeigned faith which was in him, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice." Who can dispute the sincerity of that affection, which is displayed, not in vain ostentation before the world, but in the presence of God and in the spirit of prayer ? What can be more fitted to engage the love of a rising youth, than to hear, that an eminent father of the church had his piety and his virtues alive in his memory, which, by a natural association of ideas, connected him with his faithful ancestors.

The attention of Timothy being thus roused, his heart being thus drawn to Paul as a sincere and warm friend, his exhortations came home to him with peculiar energy. "Wherefore," says he, "I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands." As if he had said, "my dear son, it ought to be your constant study to exert the talents which God hath bestowed on you, and to improve every opportunity of discharging with fidelity the duties of that office to which you are now solemnly called." "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear : " he hath not placed us in such circumstances of danger and calamity, as to be overwhelmed with despondency, but hath afforded, and will afford us, every support which is necessary to overcome our natural timidity, and to inspire us with holy courage in the midst of all opposition. He hath given

us the spirit “ of power,” for we are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, “ of love” to Christ and to the souls of men, “ of a sound mind,” to act rationally on every occasion. It is added, “ be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner :” Paul was at this time a prisoner at Rome.

The testimony of our Lord and that of Paul was materially the same. Our Lord’s testimony, adopted, believed, professed, and improved by us, becomes our own : And it should be our great concern that the testimony which we embrace be that of Jesus Christ.

Be not you, my friends, ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. Though these words be primarily addressed to Timothy the evangelist, and may properly be applied to ministers of the gospel, yet there are a variety of duties, which are common to office-bearers in the church, and to private Christians, among which may be included the duty in the text, not to be “ ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.”

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour, *first*, to explain to you the testimony of our Lord, and, *secondly*, to offer you a few exhortations which the spirit of the text seems to suggest.

The testimony of our Lord, taken in an extensive sense, includes the Scriptures of truth, of which he is the author, the substance, and the end. To illustrate this testimony, to confirm it, to exemplify and

to seal it, were some of the grand objects of his mission. "To this end," says he, "was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." To shew you at one view, what this testimony is, and why it is called the testimony of our Lord, it may not be improper to mention particularly some of the doctrines which he taught, the precepts he delivered, the miracles he wrought, the life he led, and the death which he suffered. Thus I shall confine your attention to what Christ himself testified, which includes the sum of all that is most important and interesting in the word of God.

First, The testimony of our Lord contains in it the doctrines which he taught.

Christ Jesus was, in a manner peculiar to himself, the great teacher come from God. "He spake as never man spake." He revealed, in the clearest light, doctrines which would never have entered into the heart of man to conceive, and which no finite understanding will ever be able fully to comprehend. He openly declared, that he existed from eternity, and was sent in time, by the special appointment of his Father, on an embassy of love to our fallen race. He says, accordingly, in his reasoning with the Jews, "verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am. I proceeded forth, and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." He taught also the doctrine of his equality with the Father,

and the distinct subsistence of the divine and human natures in his person. "I and my Father are one. Have I been so long a time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" A godhead, a fulness of divinity, equal to that which the Father of all possesses, was and is in the man Christ Jesus. He taught the offices which he sustains as the only mediator between God and man: That he was the only prophet who can convince the understanding and persuade the heart; the only priest who can remove guilt and pacify conscience; the only king who can "bring into subjection every thought and every imagination unto the obedience of faith:" in short, the *only way* by which we can escape misery and attain happiness. "I am the way," says he, "the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." He taught that a complete renovation of heart was absolutely necessary to partake of the joys of heaven. Accordingly, in his reasoning with Nicodemus, one of the rulers of the Jews, he says, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He taught, to the unspeakable consolation of his mourning disciples, the work and office of the Holy Spirit. "If I go away, I will send you another Comforter, even the spirit of truth; he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance." He taught the manner in which all the

blessings of grace and of glory are bestowed on his people, and the infallible security which they have of possessing them for ever. “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all, and none shall pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” With what perspicuity and elegance did he illustrate the doctrine of a providence and of a future state ! There is a peculiar beauty and tenderness of feeling in his language, when he condescends to shew us the particular regard he entertained for his friends, and the happiness they would enjoy in the kingdom of his Father. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more shall he not clothe you, O ye of little faith !” In describing the blessedness of a future state, how full of love to his disciples, how striking and animating, are his words ! “In my Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you : I go to prepare a place for you : And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.”

To sum up all, when we read our Lord’s most admirable sermon on the mount, and his other discourses, of which his parables form an eminent part,

we find in them the most important and interesting doctrines, which none could reveal but he who came to bear witness unto the truth. Here let us pause for a moment, and contemplate the brightness of the scene now before us. What an accession to the light of nature, and even of revelation, when the Sun of righteousness arose ! Now the hand of the Almighty is most strikingly visible in all his works, directing every event according to his pleasure—now we behold the eye of infinite goodness beaming with peculiar complacency on his favourite people—now the shades of death and the darkness of the tomb are dispelled, and the glories of life and immortality are brought clearly into view !

Secondly, The testimony of our Lord contains in it the precepts which he delivered.

What an excellent system of morals did he teach ! He did not merely enforce the laws of nature, or prescribe rules for promoting the peace and happiness of civil society ; he did not promulgate laws, like those of the statesman, which take cognizance of the external conduct only, but, like the Omniscient himself, as he really was, his commandments extend to every province of the heart.

His laws are pure and spiritual ; they regard the most secret movements of the soul. “Thou shalt,” says he, “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: this is the first and great commandment*.” Surely it is reasonable and according to truth ; for

* Matt. xxii. 38, 39. Mark xii. 30.

where ought a creature capable of affection to place it, but on him, who is his Maker, Preserver, and Redeemer? The second commandment which our Lord taught, is like unto the first, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*." How noble a law, but how difficult for selfish man to obey! It leads, however, to the exercise of the most diffusive benevolence, and has a direct tendency to promote the peace and comfort of all mankind.—This commandment is so eminent, that it is denominated *new*. "A new commandment," says our Lord to his disciples, "give I unto you, that ye love one another†:" Not a new commandment with respect to the *matter* of it, for it is one of the dictates of nature, one of the precepts of Moses, and it is substantially the same as it was from the beginning. But it is new, because it never loses the charm of novelty to recommend it to those who are best acquainted with it; because it is now divested of the false interpretations of the Scribes and Pharisees, and appears in a new light; and chiefly, because it has a new motive to enforce the practice of it, even the love of the Saviour, in laying down his life for his brethren.

But is the question proposed, Who is my neighbour whom I ought to love with the same sincerity and ardour as myself? Surely, it is our friends, and not our enemies. This is what we would naturally be disposed to believe. To correct this mistake, our Lord hath given us another law, which we are under equal obligations to observe. "Love your

* Matt. xxii. 39. † John xiii. 34.

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you*." Was this law made for man, who cannot receive an injury without feeling resentment, who cannot look on an enemy but with indignation? It is impossible, indeed, for the carnal man to obey it, for it is in direct opposition to his natural propensities and passions; but the spiritual man discerns its beauty and excellence—wishes from his heart to practise it in its utmost extent.—He knows, that how repulsive soever it may be to his depraved feelings, it is perfectly agreeable to truth and righteousness, and has a manifest tendency to promote the welfare and happiness of all mankind. Were this commandment universally observed, strife, animosity and war, would cease to exist,—man would be a friend to man—union and harmony would reign all over the world. What savage would he be, who would denounce cursing and bitterness against the man who was lifting up his hands and blessing him! What monster would maltreat that man, who was doing him good, and addressing our Father in heaven, for mercy to his soul! Certain it is, were this precept universally practised, society would be clothed with the most attractive charms. “O how good and how pleasant it is for brethren (of mankind) to dwell together in unity!” How like “the general assembly, and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven!”

* Matt. v. 44.

It may not be improper here to mention some of the duties of religion which our Saviour taught and enforced. The careful reading of the Scriptures, which cannot be done to advantage without serious meditation on their sacred contents. “Search the Scriptures,” said our Lord to the Jews, and this commandment is likewise addressed to us, “for they are they which testify of Christ*.” The duty of secret, of family, or social prayer, he also taught. Secret prayer is the breathing of the soul to God, the offering up of our desires to him in our retirements. “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut the door behind thee, and pray unto thy Father in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly†. Men ought always to pray and not to faint‡.” And our Lord, in the exercises of devotion, in which he was frequently engaged with his disciples, has set before us a bright example of family, of social prayer. To assist us in this duty, he hath given us an excellent pattern of prayer, which ought to be diligently studied and improved||. How strikingly also is the duty of spiritual conversation recommended, by the frequent discourses which our Lord had with his disciples ! With what pleasure did they talk concerning the things which belonged to the kingdom of God ! This exercise has a manifest tendency to promote mutual instruction, edification, and comfort. The duties of preaching, and hearing the Gospel, in which both ministers and people are deeply concerned, ought not to escape our

* John v. 39. † Matt. vi. 6. ‡ Luke xviii. 1. || Matt. vi. 9—14.

notice. With what patience, perspicuity, and fervour, did our Lord proclaim the glad tidings of salvation; and when he was going to ascend into heaven, how solemnly did he commission his Apostles, “to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel unto every creature!” And if we are commanded to preach, you are commanded to hear. Take heed *how*, and *what* you hear, are exhortations of our Lord.* Hear in faith, with serious attention, becoming meekness, with a sincere desire to have your souls edified, and your conduct reformed. Do not discover your pride or vanity, by rash criticism, either in the mode of censure or applause. Judge, however, what you hear with candour and impartiality, praying for the direction of the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth. When you are delighted with what you hear, blow not the trumpet of fame in the ear of the preacher, for if he be modest and faithful, even this will be an ungrateful sound. But to hear of its good effects on your heart and conduct, will be to him sweeter melody than the vain acclamations of thousands. On the contrary, if you are displeased with what you hear, do not make haste to pass a condemnatory sentence, but patiently examine if your judgment be according to the unerring standard of truth. If you find it to be a matter of doubtful disputation, let not misplaced zeal, in defence of it, hurry you to any vehement excess. Quench the spark of contention, by “forbearing one another in love;” for if it be fanned by the spirit of rancour and bitter-

* Luke viii. 18. Mark iv. 24.

ness, who knows what a destructive fire it may kindle? But if you find it to be an error subversive of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, of any of the fundamental articles of our holy religion, do not remain at ease, indulging a criminal indifference about the cause of Christ, but prudently use those methods of preserving the purity of truth, which the Spirit of God enjoins.—To you who are the friends of Christ, he hath left a dying charge, “do this,” says he, “in remembrance of me.” This is a command of love, and all who are actuated by the love of Christ, will feel the manifold and powerful obligations under which they are to observe it.

Thirdly, The testimony of our Lord was confirmed by the miracles which he wrought.

By a miracle, I understand, an event which is contrary to the fixed laws of nature. The probability of miracles can be doubted by none who reflects on the unbounded power of God. He who set the stupendous machine of the universe in motion, can easily stop the course of any part of it at his pleasure. That our Saviour wrought a great variety of the most astonishing miracles cannot be denied; for they were not like those of an impostor, performed in a dark corner, or in the presence of a few friends, but in the face of day, and in the sight of thousands of his enemies. These wonderful works, even keeping the inspiration of the Scriptures altogether out of view, are as well attested as any other historical facts. Any objections, therefore, against their

reality, or any attempts to show that they are mere impositions on a credulous multitude, is at once to reject the evidence of the senses, and to invalidate the truth of the most authentic records.—To assert that, in these works, our Lord was actuated by an evil spirit, as the Jews presumptuously averred, is to maintain that Satan did cast out Satan, which is manifestly absurd.

Though our Lord was omnipotent, yet he did not, on any occasion, indulge in an ostentatious display of power. He never performed a miracle but when it was necessary to accomplish some important purpose; and the grand end for the attainment of which all his miracles were performed, was the confirmation of the testimony which he bore to the truth.

But how did his miracles confirm this testimony? In it he declared, that he was in his personal character God, and also, that he was invested with a peculiar official character, as sent of God. Both of these truths, which are the foundation of all that he revealed, his miracles fully confirmed. In the clearest and most striking manner, they proved him to be Jehovah, whose dominion ruleth over all—the great God who had the elements of nature, the passions of men, the rage of devils, the power of death and the grave, completely under his controul. He was a person of his own order, and therefore, when he wrought miracles, it was in a manner peculiar to himself: it was not like one, who was merely an instrument in the hand of the Most High, but like

the Supreme Being, as he really was. He acted not like the prophets, or the apostles, who were persuaded and ready to acknowledge, that it was not by their own power, that they wrought miracles in proof of their mission; but our Lord performed his wonderful works by his own divine power, his own creative energy. Peter, expressive of his faith in the eternal power and godhead of his Master, said to the lame man, who was laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk* ;” but our Saviour, exercising the right and prerogative of which, in his own person, he was possessed, uniformly said to the palsied and infirm, “rise, take up thy bed and walk.” He also spake the dead to life. At the grave of a friend, he cried, “Lazarus, come forth†.” His command is instantly obeyed. This was the voice of God and not of a man only, the voice of the Almighty, who in the beginning said, “let there be light, and there was light,”—let there be life, and there was life. Now, as our Saviour’s miracles incontestibly proved him to be God, it necessarily follows that he is infallible in all the doctrines and precepts which he delivered.

Add to this, his testimony contained a declaration of his important mission from the Father, and his miracles proved that this declaration was true.

* Acts iii. 6. † John xi. 43.

He affirmed, that “ he proceeded forth and came from God, that he did not come of himself, but that the Father sent him.” He claimed an extraordinary mission, and he proved it by extraordinary works. “ The works that I do,” says he, “ bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me, and if I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.” But we have the most abundant reason to be fully satisfied, that he is the Messiah that should come, and that it is in vain to look for another; for you recollect the message, which was returned to the Baptist, in answer to his inquiries on this very point, “ the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them*.”

Thus, his numerous and benevolent miracles afford the most delightful and satisfactory evidence of his divine mission, of his being a messenger from heaven, guided by infinite wisdom in all that he said. He spake as he acted, “ as one having authority : he spake as never man spake.”

Fourthly, The testimony of our Lord was exemplified in his life.

The doctrines and precepts which he taught, were to him not subjects of mere speculation, but had a suitable influence on the temper of his mind, and the tenor of his conversation. In his private life did shine forth all the graces and virtues which

* Matt. xi. 5.

can adorn and ennoble a character. Every part of his conduct was in exact conformity to the letter of the divine law ; and the temper of his mind was a bright commentary on its spirit. During the whole course of his life on earth, he did that which was right in the sight of his heavenly Father, uniformly pursued the path of integrity and holiness, and inclined not, in the smallest degree, to the right hand or to the left. Though he dwelt in the midst of a world lying in wickedness, yet he contracted not the least stain of guilt; though he sometimes associated with publicans and sinners, with a view to reclaim them, such communications with evil men did not corrupt his good manners, for he was always “ holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

He taught and inculcated love to God ; and how eminently did he exemplify it in his conduct ! His heart was the constant seat of veneration, esteem, and affection towards his heavenly Father, and incessantly panted with ardent desire after the advancement of his glory. As love to God, so benevolence to man, was most conspicuously displayed in his life. Accordingly, “ he went about continually doing good,” both to the souls and the bodies of men. He instructed the ignorant, sympathized with the afflicted, healed the diseased. He was the friend of the fatherless and of the orphan, brother to the child of sorrow, and made the widow’s heart to sing for joy. He was meek under

insults, patient under suffering, brave in the view of danger. He never cherished envy, malice, or revenge against his enemies ; but, on the contrary, when he beheld the black cloud of wrath gathering around the heads of his countrymen the Jews, the tear of pity started in his eye, and this most pathetic exclamation burst from the bottom of his heart, “ O Jerusalem ! Jerusalem ! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not.” Even in his last agony on the cross, when the cruelty and rage of his enemies rose to an enormous height,—even in the midst of the most unprovoked and unprecedented indignities, his fervent prayer to his God was, “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Thus, he persevered in affording the strongest proofs of the truth of his testimony, at least of his full persuasion of its truth, by a life of spotless innocence, and exemplary virtue. He is the only character that ever appeared on earth, who spake without error, or the possibility of error, and, in every respect, acted as he spake. Thus, “ he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps.”

Fifthly, The testimony of our Lord was sealed with his blood.

As he led the life of a saint, being holy in all manner of conversation, so he suffered the death of a martyr in witnessing for the truth. It may not,

however, be improper to remark, that this is not the only, nor the chief view, in which either his life or his death ought to be contemplated. It is never to be forgotten, that he appeared on earth in a peculiar character, “as the surety of the better covenant.” Hence, as his spotless life was a course of obedience, in the room of his people, to the precepts of the law; so his death was the suffering of its penalty, as a propitiatory sacrifice for their sins. He who was “in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour.” Though these are the grand lights in which his obedience and sufferings ought to be viewed, yet there are other lights, comparatively inferior, but in themselves of great importance, which ought not by any means to be overlooked: his life ought to be considered as an example, and his death as that of a martyr.

There have been some men, who have spoken bold language in support of a cause which they professed to have espoused, when all was calm around, and no opposition appeared; but when the storm of persecution arose, silence sat down upon their lips—in the prospect of danger and of death they have shrunk back and fled away. This shewed either a consciousness of the badness of their cause, or a want of fortitude to defend it; in either case, they forfeited every claim to the noble title of martyrs.

Others again have, through ignorance, adopted a system, and, impelled by enthusiasm to support it, have fallen victims at the altar of religious frenzy; who vainly thought that they fought, and bled, and died, as the most zealous champions of the Christian faith. But our Lord was thoroughly acquainted with his own cause,—was perfectly persuaded of its infinite importance to the best interests of mankind, and, in its defence and propagation, was fully sensible of the powerful opposition he had to combat and to overcome,—the awful sufferings he had to endure. Before his omniscient eye arose the scourge, the crown of thorns, the purple robe, the nails, the cross, and, above all, the cup in his Father's hand, ready to be given him to drink, the ingredients of which were sharper than the vinegar, and more bitter than the gall. All these he beheld with undaunted resolution, for “he set his face like a flint, and knew that he should not be confounded, because his God was with him.”

He came into the world “to bear witness unto the truth.” To this end of his mission, during his life, he uniformly adhered, and he accomplished it at his death. Before he bowed the head, and gave up the ghost, he could say, “it is finished.” Thus the condition of the new covenant was fulfilled,—the blessings of his purchase which he bequeathed to his followers in a testamentary deed, and which, to speak so, he had been writing out during his residence on earth, he rolled up, as now completed,

whilst he was suspended on the cross, and sealed it with his blood, and so made it firm and sure to all generations. It is a believing view of the Captain of our salvation being made perfect through suffering in the cause of truth, which has inspired the good soldier of Jesus Christ with holy courage and magnanimity, to brave danger and death in its most frightful forms. And you, O believer, in looking forward to the close of life, may also triumph and say, “O death, where is thy sting ! O grave, where is thy victory ! Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II. I shall now address to you a few exhortations, which the spirit of the text seems to suggest.

1. Be not thou ashamed to *profess* the testimony of our Lord. Having studied this testimony, having understood and believed it,—be not ashamed openly to avow your attachment to it. When religion is fashionable, it hath many votaries. The crowd bow to it without hesitation. When they see others, and especially those who move in the higher circles of society, pursuing the same course, they are proud to follow. But when the tide of popular opinion turns,—when the great, the noble, and the mighty, set sail, and leave religion behind, the multitude are ashamed to own her as a friend,—are not afraid to be carried away with the current, though they should “make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.”

O my brethren ! in an age when all ranks

seem to have corrupted their way,—when many entertain little or no reverence for the name of God—indulge in the open profanation of the Lord's day by the notorious neglect of public worship,—convivial entertainments,—frivolous amusements,—unnecessary visits;—when many parents appear to act as if they were not persuaded that it was their duty to instruct their children, to inspect their morals, to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;—when many masters seem entirely to overlook the eternal welfare of their servants, it certainly becomes you, in the various stations and relations in which Providence hath placed you, more especially to profess your attachment to the person, to the cause, and to the laws of Christ. I do not exhort you to be ostentatious professors of religion, or, in other words, to be hypocrites; for a hypocrite is the most base and detestable of all characters; he is not ashamed to be esteemed by his neighbours around him what he is not, and, if possible, he would even impose on the Omniscient himself; but I exhort you to be real Christians, and to manifest the truth of your character by a suitable profession of your faith in the Saviour. There may be the form of godliness without the power, but wherever the power is there the form will appear.

If, therefore, you believe in Christ,—if you are persuaded of the importance and utility of the ordinances which he hath appointed, be not ashamed

publicly and uniformly to profess your faith, and to manifest its sincerity by your conduct. Though the multitude should be engaged in a continual bustle from day to day, without cherishing a pious thought, or bending the knee at the throne of grace, be not thou ashamed to meditate on the law of the Lord,—to retire from the business of the world,—“to enter into your closet, to pray unto your Father in secret, and your Father who seeth in secret shall reward you openly.”—Though the multitude should live in the habitual omission of family devotion, be not ashamed to make the voice of melody to be heard in your habitation,—though they should make no distinction between the first and the other days of the week, should dream away and neglect to improve the precious hours of that day which is sacred to the memory of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, be not thou ashamed to awake early to commemorate the glorious work of your once crucified but now risen Saviour,—to seek preparation of heart for the solemn services of religion—to rejoice in every opportunity of going up to the house of God, of sitting down at the table of the Lord, and over the sacred symbols of his broken body and shed blood, openly to avow, before God, angels, and men, that you are not ashamed of the testimony which you have embraced. Let the language of your hearts and of your profession be, “whatever others do, as for us we will serve the Lord.”

2. Be not thou ashamed to *defend* the testimony of our Lord. An examination of the truths of religion is highly necessary, because of its importance both to the present and future welfare of mankind ; and he who is without enlightened principle, is like a ship without anchor, tossed to and fro with every wind. We who have the liberty of judging for ourselves, ought to use every precaution lest we make a false determination. After sufficient inquiry, praying for the direction of the Spirit of wisdom to lead you into all truth, you have reason to believe that it is the testimony of the Lord which you have embraced, you ought not only to be uniform in its profession, but firm in its defence. In an age remarkable for change of sentiment and diversity of opinion, in a time when infidelity and error so much prevail, you may expect to be attacked from different quarters. The witticism of the free-thinker, the laugh of the fool, the banter of the profane, may be directed against you. Blush not, however, to avow that your sentiments of religion are different from theirs ; let them not alarm you into a mute submission, or to attempt a cowardly retreat, but make a bold resistance, “ knowing that the foundation of God standeth sure,” and, therefore, all that your enemies can say or do, may be regarded as the waves which beat against the rock with impotent fury, showing its immoveable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at its feet. “ No weapon formed against Zion shall prosper.” You have

abundant reason for thanksgiving unto God, that you are not exposed to that severity of persecution, which Paul endured when he addressed the exhortation to Timothy contained in the text, for at that time he was a prisoner at Rome, and was afterwards to suffer a violent death. He even rejoiced “that he was counted worthy thus to suffer for the sake of Christ :” and will you be ashamed to suffer reproach for Christ? Ridicule is not the test of truth. With this, however, which to some is a most formidable evil, you may expect to meet, in the course of your Christian profession ; and if you invariably persevere in the path of duty, this will be a test of the sincerity and strength of your belief in the truth. “ Hold fast, therefore, the profession of your faith without wavering, for faithful is he who hath promised. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. And I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of those things, though you know them and be established in the present truth.” Let your minds be stored with the knowledge, and your hearts confirmed in the belief of those truths which are of the utmost importance, but which at any time may be most disputed, and be properly furnished with arguments for their support, that you may “ always be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”

3. Be not thou ashamed to *publish* the testimony of our Lord in your conversation. Though you should have a flaming profession of religion, and

should most warmly contend for the truth, yet if your conduct do not in some measure correspond, you can have no claim to the character of a real Christian. There are some who appear to be particularly attentive to the duties of the first table of the moral law, who are not so scrupulous with regard to their observance of the duties of the second. Like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, they “pay tithes of mint, and anise, and cummin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith.” There are others who boast of their charity and honesty, whilst they have no fear of God before their eyes. Both of these characters are extremely defective, for they are entirely destitute of religious principle, which is essentially necessary to the acceptable performance of any duty.

There is a wonderful power of accommodation, that some Christians display, which is considered as no easy acquisition. They assume appearances according to the complexion of the society of which they constitute a part. Among the devout they seem to be sober and serious, and also mingle in the conversation of the dissipated and profane, as if they were not ashamed to avow, that whatever be their profession, their principles are, in no respect, materially different from those of others. What a glaring inconsistency! These things, my brethren, ought not so to be. You ought to be uniform and steady in your profession of religion, and to have a practice corresponding to it, “always bearing about

in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in your body." "Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you ought to shine as lights in the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful, in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I shall now conclude with a short address:

First, To those who are not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. Why should any man be ashamed of it? Surely it is the noblest cause that you can espouse, the cause of God, of truth, of holiness—a cause in which all that is most valuable and dear to you, is involved—a cause worthy of God to reveal, and of men to embrace; with which dignity and success are inseparably connected—a cause which the wise have studied, the eloquent have pleaded, and for which the brave have died. The testimony of our Lord, has been subscribed and maintained by many illustrious names, by patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs, by the wisest and

best of men in every age, and why should you be ashamed to be followers of them who “through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises?” Go on, and prosper in the course which you have begun to pursue. You may indeed expect to meet with opposition in the way. The breath of calumny may sully your reputation; by the wicked and ungodly you may be stigmatized with many odious names; but let this, instead of spreading the blush over your countenance, or paralyzing your efforts in the good cause you have embraced, operate on you as an excitement to more vigorous exertion, “and your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Blessed are ye when men shall revile and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Sacrifices cannot be made, magnanimity and zeal cannot be displayed in a better cause: the members of your bodies, the powers of your mind, the whole of your influence, and part of your substance, cannot be employed to better purpose, than in promoting it, for all that you possess is derived from God, and to his honour and service all should be devoted. Are you persuaded this is your duty, but it is so arduous you feel your own weakness and insufficiency for the performance of it? Believe the words of your Lord and Saviour, “My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Hold fast, therefore, the profession of your faith without wavering, for faithful is he who hath promised. Be steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Secondly, I shall now address those who are ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. Why are you ashamed of this testimony? Do you imagine that it is mean and trifling—that it has none to profess it but the foolish and weak-minded, those who are bred to low habits of thinking, or vulgar occupations, who are totally unacquainted with the discoveries of men of genius, the labours of the learned, the refinements of the polite world, and that sublime knowledge which brightens the higher circles of society? If so, you are in a gross delusion. For it is a testimony great and important in itself, the greatest, most important, and most interesting, of all things to a human being. It is the *one* thing needful, and those who truly believe and profess it, are the most noble and enlightened of men. "They are Zion's children who are taught of God," who have seen the superior excellence of religion to the pomp of state, the vain show of greatness, which the world assumes. "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity." Cast your eyes around you; see the man of pleasure not ashamed to pursue his course of riot and dissipation, which issues in disappointment, wretchedness and woe; the man of ambition, who aspires after some path

of honour, and is not ashamed to make every effort to obtain it, though at the expense of candour and integrity; the miser, who denies himself even the necessities of life, with meagre look and trembling hand, is not ashamed to collect the perishing treasure, to lock it up as his portion, whilst he renders it useless to himself and to others. Will such persons not be ashamed to pursue folly and vice, which lead to ruin, and will you be ashamed of that wisdom which cometh down from above, by which you are “made wise unto salvation?” Alas! there are some who seem to be ashamed of nothing but religion. Let such ponder that alarming declaration of our Saviour, “if any man shall be ashamed of me, or of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, the glory of the Father, and of his holy angels. O kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way; when his wrath is kindled but a little,” who can tell the awful consequences? it is safest for us to say, “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him,” for they who trust in him shall never be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. Amen.

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE CAUSE OF GOD, AND THE MANNER IN
WHICH IT IS PLEADED.

PSALM lxxiv. 22.

“ Arise, O God, plead thine own cause.”

IN the following discourse, it is proposed to describe the cause of God, or to point out its peculiar character ; to explain when it may be said God pleads his own cause ; and the sentiments or feelings of soul, of which this prayer is the native expression.

The cause of God, in the text, literally signifies, the peculiar constitution of grace which he established with his ancient people the Jews. It is denominated “ the covenant *.” By this covenant, peculiar privileges were conferred on them, and peculiar duties were required of them, by which they were eminently distinguished from all other nations. By

* Verse 20.

this, the light of truth and of mercy was in their dwellings, while all around were “the dark places of the earth, full of the habitations of cruelty.” The cause of God, therefore, may primarily be viewed as containing that system of doctrine, worship, and government, which he instituted among his ancient people, and which they were under peculiar obligations to observe.

The cause of God now, is the same with that which obtained among Israel of old, with this difference, that it is divested of all those laws that were adapted to them as a peculiar people;—of all that form or ceremony, which was merely typical, and, therefore, of temporary obligation. The cause of God now, is that system of doctrine, worship, and government, which Christ has instituted in his church, to continue unalterable to the end of time.

The cause of God, therefore, is the religion of Jesus Christ, in opposition to that of the heathen, who still occupy a great portion of the earth, who have the light of nature only to guide their steps to eternity;—in opposition to the religion of Mahomet, who pretended to be the great prophet sent from God; and this wonderful delusion still prevails over millions who inhabit the eastern world;—in opposition to the religion of the Pope, “who opposeth and exalteth himself, above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.” This is the religion that once spread a gloom over the face of Europe; and though we in these lands are greatly indebted to the zealous exertions,

and heroic sufferings, of our venerable ancestors, who, by the good hand of God upon them, were enabled to effect our deliverance from its tyrannical and degrading influence, yet in some kingdoms it is still established in all its horrors and abominations. This is Antichrist, whose downfall, notwithstanding all his apparent revivals, is absolutely certain, for it is predicted by Him who is faithful and true.

Where is this cause to be found delineated? In the sacred writings, which contain the only rule of faith and obedience. But though the whole Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain it, and, by their mutual light, serve to illustrate it; and though its doctrines are to be found in both, but more clearly revealed in the latter, yet, especially the mode of worship, and the form of government, in the Christian church, are to be found only in the writings of the New Testament, which record the rise and early progress of Christianity.

Though this cause, is, doubtless, revealed in the Scriptures with sufficient fulness and perspicuity, for to them the charge of imperfection is not to be imputed, yet a diversity of sentiment concerning some parts of it has obtained even among intelligent and good men. This has given rise to angry controversy, and occasioned many unhappy divisions in the Christian church. It would be exceeding the bounds of truth, to assert, that *every thing*, held by any one denomination of Christians, by which it differs from another, is included in the

cause of God, because man cannot divest himself of those infirmities and passions, which are inseparable from his nature, in the present state of imperfection, and are too often found to intermingle themselves even with his efforts of religious zeal. It would also be a breach of charity, to suppose, that among the various denominations of professing Christians, there is *one only* who hath retained the cause of God, and all others have abandoned it. Though the language of our profession is, that there is only one, which, after serious and diligent examination, we believe to be the most pure, and, upon the whole, most conformable to the unerring standard, yet we are far from claiming to ourselves the attribute of infallibility, and thus pronouncing the sentence of excommunication on all who do not follow with us. Luther and Calvin, these celebrated instruments which God employed in the reformation from popery, most certainly maintained, upon the whole, the cause of God, though in some particulars they differed about the sacrament of the supper, and the form of church government. And in an earlier age, though Paul and Barnabas separated from each other, both of them were still good men; and none of them could justly be said to have abandoned the cause of Christ.

What then are the leading features of the cause of God by which it may be known? It is his *own* cause.

First, It is a cause that embraces his peculiar

character. What is the moral character of God? He is a Being of unchangeable truth, of immaculate holiness, of infinite love. His cause is like unto him, is a transcript of himself, his perfect resemblance.

It is the cause of truth, in opposition to all falsehood, deceit, or error. It is no imposition on mankind; it pretends to nothing but what it really is; what it hath proved, and will prove itself to be. It is founded on the divine nature; perfectly agreeable to the constitution of things; consistent with all that is upright and permanent. Christ himself, in his divine and mediatorial character and relations, who is the sum and substance of this cause, and whom it reveals, is the Truth;—he is the image of the invisible God;—and if we have seen him, we have seen the Father also. It reveals invisible and glorious objects to our faith; but it is not unreasonable to believe them, for they really exist, possessing all the properties which are there represented as belonging to them: the doctrines of the Gospel are the reasonable, unadulterated milk of the word.

It is the cause of holiness, in opposition to all deformity and pollution. It reveals the mystery of godliness. It gives no encouragement to any iniquity, admits not of sin in any shape, not even in thought. God is holy, and as he is, so is his cause. The doctrines it contains are holy, for “the words of God are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace.” The ordinances and precepts it enjoins are

holy ; “ the commandment is holy.” The great design and tendency of its promises, are to make us partakers of a divine nature, and to “ perfect holiness in the fear of God.” From all we hear a voice thus addressing us, “ be ye holy,” saith Jehovah, “ for I am holy.”

It is the cause of love and of peace. God is love. He is the God of peace, of order, and not of confusion. It reveals the only method of reconciliation with that almighty benevolent Being whom we have offended. It reveals “ God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.” It teaches love to the Father of all, and love to the brethren. “ Be ye imitators of God as dear children.” It lifts its warning voice against all irregularity and disorder ; against all contests for victory, but not for truth ; against all unwarrantable divisions in the church. “ Let all things be done in decency and in order. Endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” All these and other duties it enforces by the noblest and most persuasive motives. “ Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.”

Secondly, It is God’s own cause, for his glory is peculiarly concerned in it. If it reveal his character, his glory must be involved in it ; for what is his glory but himself ? what is the manifesta-

tion of his glory but the display of his moral perfections?

The glory of his truth is intimately connected with, and most illustriously displayed in this cause: "For he is a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he." How can man, sinful man, be just with God? The reply to this important question, which it is the peculiar excellence of this cause to explain, unfolds the glory of divine truth and righteousness: "For God is just even when he justifies the ungodly." Here he commits no mistake or error, but completely answers to his name, the True God. "For we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness."

The glory of his holiness is concerned in this cause; for this it displays in the highest degree. Every doctrine, every ordinance, every declaration and promise of the gospel, every precept and threatening of the law, show his infinite detestation of sin, and his unalterable determination to inflict on it exemplary punishment. When we look carefully into it, when we survey it on all sides, are we not disposed to exclaim, "Who can stand before thee a holy Lord God!"

The glory of the divine love is concerned in this cause; for this it displays in the highest degree. What accents ever fell on the human ear like these!

“ God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This is the only music that can soothe and arrest the believing soul. “ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The delightful proclamation from heaven is, “ Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men.” From the inexhaustible treasures of his benevolence, God hath given to sinners of the human race, not only his Son to be their ransom, but also his Spirit to be their guide, their sanctifier, and their comforter. He hath given them both a Saviour from guilt, and a companion to direct and to cheer them, as they pass through his wilderness of tears. He hath bestowed on them “ the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession. Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Wisdom’s ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. In keeping of God’s commandments there is a great reward.”

Thirdly, It is God’s own cause, for it is that which he is peculiarly bound to support.

This is abundantly manifest, from its revealing his character and displaying his glory ; for he cannot deny himself, and his glory he will not give to another. He will not therefore suffer his cause, with

which his character and his glory are so inseparably connected, to perish ; nay, he will not only uphold it in existence, but will make it to grow and flourish, amid all the changes of this stormy region. Not only by his promise, but by his very nature, he is bound to support it, and to render it victorious over all opposition. Sooner shall God cease to love truth, purity, and peace ; sooner shall he cease to exist, than he can permit his own cause to be covered with universal contempt, or to sink into everlasting oblivion. It will always have some friends to support it, who rely on heavenly resources ; some advocates of ability and zeal to plead it, depending on the aid of supernatural influence ; their arguments and their eloquence, however much they may be disregarded by many upon earth, will be listened to by the great Judge in heaven ; and to the confusion and ruin of all their adversaries, a decision in their favour shall be ultimately pronounced. God, in the course of his providence, hath pleaded, does plead, and will plead, his own cause. This leads me,

II. To consider when it may be said God pleads his own cause.

The language here is obviously in allusion to what takes place in judicial proceedings, and frequently occurs in the sacred writings. Thus, David appeals unto God, with regard to his formidable adversary Saul, “ The Lord be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see and plead my cause,

and deliver me out of thine hand *.” And, on another occasion, he says, “plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me †.” For God to plead his cause, according to this idea, is to act, in the course of his providence, in such a manner as to support the interests of truth, of holiness, and of peace, in opposition to all who labour for their destruction.

This seems to imply that there are two great causes, diametrically opposite, and extremely hostile to each other, at issue. The cause of God, the character of which I have briefly delineated, and the cause of Satan, which, being opposite to the other, must be that of error, of impurity, of strife. The friends of error, of impurity, of strife, are so many advocates who have undertaken the cause of the latter, and are determined to employ their talents, and exert their influence for its defence. The friends of truth, of holiness, and of peace, are advocates who are engaged in the cause of the former, and are resolved to support it, in the strength of Him who hath raised them to such high dignity, and reposed in them such an important trust. The trial, many ages past, has commenced; in the course of divine providence it is still going on, and will be finished at the consummation of all things. It is unnecessary to conjecture how it will terminate, for a righteous sentence shall be pronounced, and

* 1 Sam. xxiv. 15.

† Psalm xxxv. 1.

just judgment shall be executed. The truth is great, and will prevail.

God, in former times, both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, hath in a most wonderful manner pleaded his cause, by extraordinary interpositions in its favour. Does not the history of Moses and the Prophets, of Christ and the Apostles, contain a succession of miracles the most astonishing, in support of the cause of God and truth? Jehovah hath pleaded his cause, by making the elements of nature, on several occasions, the ministers of his vengeance against his enemies,—by his striking communications to his servants the prophets,—by the many wonderful works performed by them,—by the important and seasonable messages which they published unto others,—by the mission, the discourses, the miracles, the life, the death, the resurrection of his Son and our Saviour,—by the descent of the Spirit,—by the miraculous powers conferred on the Apostles,—by their heavenly doctrines, their holy courage, their upright conduct,—by the success of their ministry, in the rapid and extensive progress of Christianity, in spite of all the most formidable opposition from earth and hell, for in a very few years the standard of the cross was erected in every quarter of the globe. But, on these extraordinary methods of God's pleading his cause, I intend not to enlarge.

God may be said to plead his own cause, in the ordinary dispensations of his providence,

First, by raising up men of talent to state it fairly and to illustrate it clearly, in opposition to those who would darken and misrepresent it.

A good cause only requires to be fairly stated and clearly explained, that its excellence may appear. For this purpose, men of superior abilities may not seem to be so necessary as men of candour and common sense. But a bad cause must not be represented in a true light; its native deformity must be concealed; it must, if possible, be made to assume a fair and imposing form. To accomplish this, great powers of intellect, in the enemies of the truth, have been deemed absolutely necessary. If so, are not equally great powers necessary to detect the sophistry of their reasoning, and the false glare of their colouring? Has not this obtained in fact? Whilst the infidel boasts of the displays of genius and taste, the stores of learning and information that can be collected on his side, cannot the Christian muster among his friends men equal, nay, superior in these respects? The great Sir Isaac Newton, the wonder of his own, and of every succeeding age, for philosophical acuteness, and sagacious investigation, to whose discoveries science is so much indebted, was a firm and zealous supporter of divine revelation. To him many others in the literary world, whose names are well known to fame, might be added. Even Luther and Calvin, whom God, in the dark ages of popery raised up, to purify his religion from the gross errors and abominations with which it was contaminated, to rescue it

from spiritual tyranny, to break asunder the chains with which it was bound, and to send it forth in its genuine charms to bless the world, were men of uncommon powers of understanding, as their valuable writings that have come down to us clearly prove. And since that memorable period, ever dear to civil and religious liberty, hath not God continued in his church a succession of able as well as faithful ministers of the New Testament to support his cause? Every attack upon it has been a call to its friends to put forth their strength in its defence; and their exertions have not been in vain. It has been pleaded by a force of argument, and felicity of illustration, vastly superior to any exhibitions that were ever made by its adversaries.

Secondly, By raising up men of undaunted courage to defend it, when opposed by force or violence.

The enemies of true religion, convinced that their cause cannot be supported by fair, or by false reasoning, have had recourse to compulsory measures, to force of arms:—hence the march of Mahomedism and Popery is marked with blood. It therefore becomes those who would defend the truth, not to be deterred by the threats of the adversary, nor to fear them who can only kill the body. That this has been the fact, many who are dead yet speak. Those christian heroes fell triumphant, fighting the good fight of faith; and their very blood proclaims, in a language more pathetic and impressive than any words can express, the goodness and might of their

leader, the righteousness of their cause, and the happiness of all who have the honour to be engaged in it. God hath pleaded his cause, by the lively faith, the firm integrity, the unbending fortitude, of prophets, of apostles, of martyrs, in every age of persecution for conscience' sake. "They obeyed God rather than man; resisted unto blood, striving against sin; were faithful unto death, and have received a crown of life."

Whilst infidels may boast of insensibility, of indifference, and even of levity, in the prospect of dissolution, which is the sum of all the examples they can gather from the most eminent of their fraternity, on whom they lavish all their applause, we can bring forward to the view of an intelligent, holy, admiring generation, ardent desires of death, and the most noble superiority to its terrors, which nothing but a firm faith in Jesus, and a lively hope of life and immortality, brought to light by the gospel, are fitted to inspire. Those, "of whom the world was not worthy," have gloried to suffer for the sake of Christ; rather than renounce the cause which they had espoused, they have cheerfully embraced the gibbet, the stake, and the flames. "None of these things," says Paul, "move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I may finish my course with joy. I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" than to remain in a present evil world. Such magnanimity and fortitude have most powerfully and successfully pleaded the cause of God.

Thirdly, By raising up men of eminent piety, to adorn it by their conversation.

The cause of God is not a speculative but a practical system ; and when it is believed, it will be openly professed, and supported by corresponding conduct. The faith of it is a living, active principle, that will prove its existence, and display its charms, by “ a conversation becoming the gospel.” The influence of example over the minds of men, has been universally acknowledged to be more powerful than that of precept, and never fails, in a greater or less degree, to impress its image on the manners of society. Even those who may not have a capacity for reasoning, for examining all the bearings of a system, have eyes to see consistency of conduct in its professors. The beauty of holiness, exhibited in the conversation, is like a portrait where the form and features of Christianity can be recognised by all ; like a writing, the character of which is legible even by the most vulgar and illiterate. True Christians, accordingly, are represented as “ the epistles of Christ, known and read of all men.”

By the piety, purity, and integrity, manifest in the conversation of his friends, God hath, in all ages, pleaded his cause. Thus Paul states his conduct as an argument in defence of the soundness of his principles, in opposition to that of those who resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. “ Their folly shall be manifest unto all men ; but thou hast fully known,” says he

to Timothy, “ my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience *.” And he exhorts his son in the faith, if he would succeed in his preaching, to be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity †.” And indeed no man, whatever be the station he holds in the church, can reasonably expect to be successful in supporting and defending the truth, who uniformly contradicts it in his conduct. The enemy will say, and say justly, how can he be in earnest ; for he certainly does not believe what he teaches or what he professes ? Where the truth is really believed, it must have a practical influence over the whole man : And how great and happy are the effects of good example ? It enlightens the understanding, while it persuades the heart ; and, in proportion as it is admired and imitated, diffuses a charm throughout every circle into which it enters. Has not God, at various periods, and among different nations, raised up men, distinguished for their godly conversation, by means of which he hath eminently supported and propagated his cause ? It is here unnecessary to mention names ; for they are so numerous that some of them cannot have escaped your recollection ; let us study to add to the list, to prove ourselves worthy of such an honourable distinction, by adorning “ the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”

* 2 Tim. iii. 10.

† 1 Tim. iv. 12.

Fourthly, By overruling the efforts of its enemies to defeat their own purposes.

This, in the course of divine providence, has been remarkably exemplified, in manifold instances too tedious to enumerate. Suffice it to say, that the great and formidable opposition that the tyrant of Egypt displayed against the Hebrews, issued in his own destruction. This showed, in a most striking light, the weakness of his cause, and the folly of his conduct; and, at the same time, clearly illustrated that the cause he persecuted with such virulence and violence was from heaven, and which the Almighty was engaged to support.

Were not the heresies that early arose in the Christian church, and the terrible sufferings inflicted by her enemies on her genuine members, overruled by Jehovah for the propagation of his own cause? Did not the errors published by false teachers afford occasion for the inspired writers themselves to insist the more on the proofs and illustrations of the opposite truths? Did not the Apostle John write the beginning of his Gospel, with a view to establish the divinity of our Saviour, in opposition to the contrary doctrine, which, by Cerinthus and others, was then maintained? Did not Paul write his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, to establish the truth of a sinner's justification by the free grace of God, through the righteousness of Christ, in opposition to those Judaizing teachers, who contended for the necessity of ceremonial rites, or mo-

ral performances, either in whole or in part, for our acceptance with God, and our title to eternal life? Did not James write his epistle, to show the necessity of good works, as the grand evidence and fruit of faith, in opposition to those who taught that the grace of God, in the salvation of sinners, gave encouragement to a licentious course of life? Do we not find the inspired writers, in the course of their reasonings, frequently starting objections in the name of their opponents, that, by the arguments with which they were repelled, the truth might be the more clearly and fully established?

Since the days of inspiration, has not error, taught and published, called forth the most able and eloquent defences of the truth? In this respect, perhaps no age has been more distinguished than our own. What light hath lately been thrown on the authority and evidences of divine revelation, on the divinity and atonement of our Saviour, and other capital doctrines of Christianity, which by some have been openly denied? Let not the authors and abettors of error, on this account, take merit to themselves, but let our gratitude rise to the Father of all, who permits and overrules their exertions to defeat their own designs, by making them subservient to the illustration of the truth. This important purpose is accomplished, not only by a more clear and full display of the truth, as a proper answer to an objection always does, but also, by rousing the

attention, by exciting the most earnest diligent inquiry after the truth, searching for its evidence, which directly leads to the destruction of that implicit faith, or faith falsely so called, which is so injurious to the interests of true religion. Add to this, as opposition tends to enliven the zeal, and unite the exertions of the friends of truth, so it must ultimately lead to the support and prosperity of a good cause. To this there is nothing more adverse than that supineness, that lukewarm indifference, which sometimes seizes upon them, when all around is like the unruffled face of the sky, where every appearance of a threatening storm is completely vanished. An army is never more in danger than when it presumes that the foe keeps at a distance, being afraid to make the attack; and therefore, instead of improving themselves in military discipline, and having their weapons in proper order for the combat, lay them aside to rust, and transform their camp into a scene of indolence or festivity. They are then ready to be taken by surprise, and to be easily overcome. But the vigilance and attacks of the enemies of the truth, when seen and felt, operate as a strong excitement on its friends, and thus, whilst apprehensive of their own safety, they are animated with increasing zeal for the cause they have espoused; are loudly called to unite in affection, and to combine their efforts; to put on their armour, and to be better prepared than ever for its defence. Thus it

is that God hath made his cause to prosper the more that it was opposed and persecuted.

III. Let us now shortly consider the sentiments or feelings of soul, of which this prayer is the native expression : “ Arise, O God, plead thine own cause.”

1. This prayer evidently proceeds from a heart deeply affected with the low and neglected state of the cause of God. “ Arise, O God,” says Asaph, as if Jehovah had been asleep concerning it, and seemed in his apprehension to have forsaken or neglected it. Similar is the prayer of the prophet, “ Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord ; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old *.”

If the cause of religion be in a low state when its enemies are numerous, powerful, and triumphant, when its friends are few, timid, and inactive, when there is no auspicious star to be seen, prognosticating a favourable change, this certainly was the case with the church when the prayer in the text was addressed unto God. For, says the Psalmist, “ We see not our signs : there is no more any prophet, neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach ? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever ? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand ? Pluck it out of thy bosom †.”

Must not every pious soul, when contemplating

* Isaiah li. 9.

† Verses 9, 10, 11.

Zion in such a deplorable situation, be filled with sorrow? To this disease of the mind, worldly grandeur, opulence, and pleasure, are not effectual remedies. Even Nehemiah, that man of God, could not but appear sad in the presence of Artaxerxes the king, amid every earthly comfort, when he reflected on the desolations of Zion the city of his God *.

2. This prayer proceeds from a heart fully persuaded of God's ability to plead his own cause, or to grant deliverance unto his church. Such a persuasion is necessary to the offering up of our desires to God in understanding and in faith. That prayer to the Most High would be unreasonable and foolish, which did not imply a belief that *He only* was able to grant the request of our lips.

Thus the Psalmist here was convinced that his own powers and eloquence were not sufficient to plead the divine cause; that it was not in man, or in angels, who excel man in wisdom and in strength, to do it, and therefore to them, in the time of need, he does not apply; but looks above all, to the throne of God, and pours forth his prayer to him, in all the ardour of importunity, and the sincerity of faith. We find him, accordingly, claiming God as his King, expressive of his belief in the sovereignty, power, and dominion of Jehovah, and celebrating.

* Nehemiah, chap. ii.

with wonder and admiration, the mighty deeds that Omnipotence alone can perform. “ For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength, thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood ; thou driedst up mighty rivers. The day is thine, the night also is thine ; thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth ; thou hast made summer and winter*.”

Here, in the most sublime language, is expressed a full persuasion of God's ability to revive his cause when it is in a languishing condition ; to support and promote it when oppressed and persecuted. He can, according to his pleasure, enfeeble, disperse, or consume the enemies of his church, even when they appear most strong and formidable, as easily as he can curb, destroy, or render useful to man, the most ferocious animals that his power hath created and upholds in existence. He can produce a most delightful change in his church, even when its aspect is most gloomy and portentous, with as great facility as he can chase away the shades of night by the rising sun, or dissolve the snows and frosts of winter by the warm breezes of the spring.

* Verses 12—17.

3. This prayer proceeds from a heart fully persuaded of God's willingness to plead his own cause.

From a persuasion of God's ability to plead his cause, we are not necessarily led to infer his willingness; but when we are assured that he hath pledged his power by covenant, or compact, for this purpose, then we can have no doubt of his willingness. Thus, he who utters the prayer in the text, calls on God to have respect unto the "covenant." Unto what covenant? To that which he made with Israel, that he would be "their God, and the God of their seed," that he would be "their light and their salvation."

This covenant was the result of infinite wisdom, the offspring of sovereign, free, and rich mercy, in which God pledged himself not to leave his people to themselves, nor to the will of their enemies. This, therefore, afforded them sufficient ground of confidence, that though the church might be brought low, he would interpose for her help. We find, accordingly, David saying on a similar occasion, that the Lord would "arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, was come*."

The persuasion of God's willingness to plead his cause, might be drawn from other considerations; that it is his own cause, the cause which

* Psal. cii. 13.

he hath planned, which he hath chosen, in which he delights, and therefore it is his will that it shall prosper. Now, "his counsel shall stand, and he shall do all his pleasure." He sometimes, indeed, permits it to be brought low, and apparently to be buried in the dust, that its resurrection may the more illustriously display his power and grace. Let us therefore pray, in the full assurance of faith, "Arise, O God, and plead thine own cause."

4. This prayer proceeds from a heart full of hope that the Lord will arise, and in due time render his cause successful.

Though it indicates grief of mind, it is not the language of despair. As it is the prayer of faith, founded on the commandment and promise of God, so it is accompanied with hope that the Lord will fulfil his promise, in the season that appears most fit to his infinite wisdom.

In the darkest night of the church, a ray of hope is to be seen. The Lord may appear, in the apprehension of his people, to have abandoned them, and they may even in their haste say so, but they will soon find reason to correct the expression. "Zion said the Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." But what saith the Lord? "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold! I have graven thee on the palms of my hands, thy

walls are continually before me*.” The church may be brought into such a situation of distress, as to pour forth her complaint in the most affecting strains—“Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” This, sad as it is, is not the tone of despair. For it is added, “This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary, who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders, thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people†.” Thus the word of God is our comfort in our affliction, and when we pray, let us say, “remember the word unto thy servants on which thou hast caused us to hope.”

5. This prayer plainly indicates an ardent desire and corresponding exertion, that the cause of God may be speedily crowned with success.

Being deeply affected with the low state of Zion,

* Isaiah xlix. 14, 15, 16.

† Ps. lxxvii. 7—15.

being fully persuaded of God's ability and willingness to recover her, and, being filled with hope that he will do so in his own time, it is the ardent desire of the saint, that the Lord would arise and have mercy upon her. What language can be more expressive of sincere earnestness than this, "O deliver not the soul of thy turtle dove unto the multitude of the wicked, forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever! Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name*."

Sincere and ardent desire, is always accompanied with the use of means for its gratification. Prayer itself is a mean that God hath appointed, and which he frequently employs and blesses, for showing his kindness unto his church. For this, for what? even for that which God hath purposed and promised to bestow, "yet for this will he be inquired of by the house of Israel that he may do it for them†." But prayer is not the *only* mean that ought to be employed for this purpose, for when such is the case, all is hypocrisy. True and fervent prayer for the accomplishment of an object, is never to be found alone: it is always accompanied with suitable activity in the performance of other duties. Have you the revival of religion at heart? You will not

* Ps. lxxiv. 19, 20, 21.

† Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

only pray for it, but be diligent in endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to arouse the careless, to reclaim the wanderer, to comfort the afflicted, and to recommend to all, both by word and deed, simplicity and godly sincerity.

To conclude: I would exhort you, my Christian friends, to endeavour to make yourselves thoroughly acquainted with the cause of God, which you are bound to support. It is a cause, the great essential characters of which are embraced by every believer in Christ, and when he acts a worthy part, supports and promotes it. You should therefore be able to distinguish it from every other cause, from the cause of a party, which hath always some selfish or carnal object in view. It is a fearful sentiment adopted by the Roman Catholics, that there is no salvation out of the pale of their own church. Is not this saying that the cause of God is exclusively with them? But whilst we maintain that, by their errors in doctrine, their idolatries and superstition in worship, they have altogether abandoned it; are there not some members of Protestant churches who seem to act on a similar principle, though in words they disavow it? They will not co-operate with Christians of other denominations in diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world. Though no doubt we ought to act in a consistency with our profession of religion, yet surely that profession must have in it something that requires correction, which forbids

us to act in union with others, though not of our communion, in promoting the grand characteristic principles of Christianity, in which we are all agreed; those principles, the belief of which is essentially necessary to salvation. All true Christians are of *one faith*, therefore the matters about which they differ being of comparatively inferior importance, should not alienate their affections, or divide, and thus enfeeble their exertions, in promoting the common cause of God that they have embraced. Let us never forget its prominent features, that it is the cause of truth, of holiness, and of peace, and therefore, that which supports error, connives at vice, encourages strife and separation among brethren, must be of an opposite description. Let us always endeavour to be the friends of the one, but the opponents of the other.

In this cause, you ought to cultivate and display holy and ardent zeal. It is a cause of the utmost importance, and of the highest interest to mankind, that in which the character of God is revealed, in which his glory is peculiarly concerned, and which he is bound to support, therefore it will not admit of lukewarmness or indifference. Than this there is nothing more unworthy of the Christian character, more detestable in the eye of Omniscience. Some there are, who expend their zeal on matters of doubtful disputation, while they are careless about principles of acknowledged vital importance to Christianity. Let not such a spirit be exhibited in our

conduct, but let us proportion our zeal to the importance of the object we have in view. Thus we shall imitate our noble ancestors, who were instruments in the hand of Providence for accomplishing our deliverance from Popish tyranny and superstition. "The mantle of the Apostles," says an eloquent writer, "fell upon the Reformers, while 'the spirit of judgment and of burning,' both enlightened their path, and devoured the thorns and briars which impeded their march. The interests which they rose to vindicate, the severity of the conflicts which they had to sustain, and the long train of consequences which were to follow from their measures, called forth that mighty talent, magnanimous feeling, and elevated principle, which have nothing to throw away upon trifles; but endless treasures of intellect and toil, of suffering and of blood, to lavish on the cause of Jesus Christ*." It is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing, and in this you follow a higher example than that of martyrs and apostles, even that of our Lord and Saviour; for "the zeal of his Father's house did eat him up."

Whatever apology you may make for not pleading the cause of God by argument, surely you can have none for not endeavouring to plead it by your conduct. You may want ability to reason with your adversaries, but even this may be greatly supplied by study and application; but beware that you do not

* Dr. Mason.

also want fortitude to resist the manifold temptations with which you are surrounded, and thus to abandon the cause of God ; or prudence, piety, and purity, to maintain and adorn it. It is the cause of truth ; endeavour to commit no error against the word of God ; or against your own conscience. It is the cause of purity ; avoid therefore every sin, and “ perfect holiness in the fear of God.” It is the cause of love and peace ; “ wherefore lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speaking, and endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” “ Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you, as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. For so is the will of God, that with well doing, you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free, but not as using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men, love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king*.”

Are there any among you, who are altogether regardless of the interests of religion, who never lift up a prayer, or contribute a mite, for their support and prosperity ? You are the enemies of the cause of God. Perhaps you will say, how can this be ? Surely we

* 1 Peter ii. 11, 12—15, 16, 17.

have not declared war against it, nor are we active in our opposition to it. But you care for none of those things" which concern the glory of God, in the establishment and enlargement of the kingdom of truth, of righteousness, and of peace in the world. This you leave altogether to others, and you are not disposed to quarrel with them. But what saith our Saviour? "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." If all your attention be devoted to the welfare of the body, to the business of this world, to the vain pursuits of time, seriously consider, whether you are not neglecting the great end of your being. Be aroused to a sense of your guilt and danger! Do you not see time rapidly receding from you, and the boundless ocean of eternity rolling its mighty tide to swallow you up? Oh, what will become of you, if you be found enemies to God, and to his cause, in the great day of final decision! Be convinced, before it be too late, that your conduct has a direct tendency to counteract the benevolent designs of God, in the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, and to frustrate the grand end which the faithful servants of the Most High have in view, in all their labours. Why are they so much in earnest, by their prayers and corresponding exertions, that God would arise and plead his own cause? Is it not that the ignorant may be brought to the knowledge of the Saviour; that those who are perishing in their sins may be saved by the blood of Jesus; that those who are

careless about the most important of all interests, the interests of their souls, may be brought to serious consideration; that those who are wandering afar off from happiness, may be arrested in their course, and turned into the right way; that such as you, who are the enemies of God, whatever you may think of yourselves, may become his friends? There is no safety for you but by embracing the cause of God. Those who are engaged in open hostility against it, and those who are indifferent to it, are allies in an evil work, and shall fall together in one common ruin: "For no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper." O, be persuaded then to repent of your ways, and to come over to the Lord's side. Jehovah waiteth to be gracious. He is pleading with you, and pleading for your good. Comply with his merciful invitation. "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*."

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE STANDARD OF THE CHRISTIAN
CHARACTER.

GALATIANS vi. 16.

“As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

THESE words present to our consideration the rule according to which Christians should walk; the character of the persons on whom the benediction is pronounced; and the blessings which it particularly embraces.

I. Let us consider the rule according to which Christians should walk.

The original meaning of the word here translated *rule**, literally refers to an object straight, in opposition to crooked; to any thing straight in examining other things, as a tongue or needle in a balance, or a plummet in building; and, by an easy transition, it is used to signify that by which our sen-

* Κανον.

timents and conduct ought to be examined and regulated. Now, the Holy Scripture is the only standard or rule of faith and practice. "The law of the Lord is perfect. To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them." All Scripture is useful as a standard of belief and of morality, for it "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*." To attempt even an outline of all the doctrines and precepts which the Scriptures contain, would lead me into too wide a field of discourse, neither is it necessary to the illustration of my subject; for by the rule in the text I understand the epistle which the Apostle addressed unto the Galatians, or rather, the doctrines and precepts it contains, and which he intended them to observe in forming their system of faith and of practice. These may be abridged under the four following particulars:

First, This rule contains the doctrine of justification through faith in the righteousness of Christ, in opposition to the works of the law, to the merit of any works, either ceremonial or moral.

One grand object of Paul in this epistle to the Galatians, is to teach them, that the salvation of lost men is of grace and not of works. He was not ashamed plainly to declare this most important

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

truth, in opposition to those who would pervert the Gospel of Christ ; and he even openly blamed his beloved brother Peter, who, through a criminal timidity, not a little accommodated to the prejudices of the circumcision. The dissimulation with which Peter, Barnabas, and other Jews, were chargeable, justly merited disapprobation and censure. He says, accordingly, “ that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel,” because they seemed to adhere to the rite of circumcision, and other ceremonial observances, as necessary, either in whole or in part, to their acceptance with God—they shunned to declare, by doctrine and example, that the righteousness of Christ *alone*, is the foundation of a sinner’s justification in the sight of their offended Maker. Thus, they acted contrary to that Gospel, which teacheth, that “ a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*.”

The covenant which God made with Abraham, though it was accompanied with peculiarities, particularly in reference to his seed according to the flesh, which were of temporary duration, yet it substantially embraced the everlasting covenant of grace, and was a special revelation of that plan of mercy, according to which sinners of mankind, of every na-

* Gal. ii. 16.

tion and of every age, obtain pardon, acceptance in the sight of God, and a title to eternal life. The manner, accordingly, in which Abraham was justified, is exhibited as a pattern according to which every sinner is justified. There is not one way of being saved under the law, and another under the Gospel, but it is one and the same to men of whatever description, under every dispensation of grace. As there is only one place of happiness for all, so there is only one way of entering into it: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they that be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ*."

Now, in Christ believers are blessed, because, as the surety of the better covenant, he fulfilled its condition; by obeying the precepts of the violated law, and satisfying the demands of offended justice in their room, he finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, brought in an everlasting righteousness; and because this righteousness was wrought out for them, it is by God, in

* Chap. iii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 16.

the happy moment, of effectual calling, imputed to them for their justification. Of this they are fully persuaded, and at the same time convinced, that there is nothing in themselves to recommend them to the divine favour, but every thing to excite the divine displeasure; they rest their claim, and place their dependance for every needful blessing, on the foundation of what Christ hath done and suffered for them. They can say with the Apostle, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith *." Those, therefore, who build their hopes on any other foundation, reject the great, the only atonement for sin, and expose themselves to the awful punishment of unbelief. Paul, accordingly, plainly asserts to those to whom he wrote, that "if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace. For we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith †."

Thus, whilst many desired "to make a fair show in the flesh," to boast of circumcision, and other carnal rites, to the dishonour of God, and of the per-

* Chap. iii. 13, 14.

† Chap. v. 2, 3, 4, 5.

fect righteousness of Christ, Paul was determined to renounce every external privilege, every Christian attainment, all good of whatever description, wrought in him or done by him, as the ground of his dependence; and to triumph in the finished work of his divine Saviour, as alone worthy his esteem and confidence. Hence one of his noblest raptures is, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ *.” Let us go and do likewise.

Secondly, This rule contains the necessity and importance of the entire renovation of our fallen nature.

In the verse preceding the text, we are informed that “in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” This is the same doctrine that our Saviour taught Nicodemus: “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God†.” The Apostle here teaches, that it is not the external rite of circumcision which is valuable, but the spiritual blessing signified by it. The same truth he exhibits in his other epistles: “He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter‡.” “We are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by the cutting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ§.”

* Chap. v. 14. † John iii. 3. ‡ Rom. ii. 28. § Col. ii. 11.

This spiritual circumcision, is the work of the Holy Spirit, and is inseparably connected with union to Christ. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature ; all old things are passed away, and all things are become new." Here a blessed change takes place, which extends to the whole man. It is complete in so far as it pervades every power of the soul ; but imperfect, because in no power has it attained its highest degree of excellence. The man who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, hath new principles of action,—new objects of pursuit,—new grounds of hope,—new sources of strength and of joy.—This is a glorious change. With it, the change from the gloom of night to the light of day, from the horrors of winter to the beauties of spring, is not once to be compared. It is a creation that displays, in a peculiar manner, the glory of God,—always grows in beauty and in grandeur, cannot be destroyed, nor even tarnished, by the change of seasons, the lapse of ages, or the dissolution of worlds. It is a change highly important, nay, absolutely necessary, to our possessing the character of real Christians, to our being in communion, and holding fellowship with God on earth, and our enjoying his blessed presence in heaven for ever.

Without this change of heart, your external privileges cannot profit you. Boast not of your baptism—of your being communicants at the Lord's table, for what will it avail you to have been baptised with water, if you be not "washed with the wash-

ing of regeneration ,and the renewing of the Holy Ghost?" What will it avail you to have eaten the Lord's supper, if there have been wanting in you " a new heart and a right spirit?" Depend not on your exercises of devotion, or external reformation of conduct; for without this change all is done in hypocrisy; and the longer you continue in this state, you are repeating those actions which can only add to the sum of your iniquities. Remember that this is a law of Christ's kingdom, " except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*."

Thirdly, This rule contains the doctrine of Christian liberty.

Thus the Apostle exhorts, " stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh†." This liberty is a necessary consequence of the other privileges that have been mentioned, and inseparably connected with them. It includes a deliverance from the burdensome yoke of ceremony under which the ancient people of God was, " which was a yoke which no man, neither we nor our fathers, were able to bear." The law of types and ceremonies was " a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ ‡," because by significant emblems he was therein represented, and thus

* John iii. 5.

† Chap. v. 1, 13.

‡ Chap. iii. 24.

taught unto the people; but when faith is come—when the New Testament dispensation is introduced, we are no longer under this schoolmaster, but delivered from that slavery which his rigid discipline imposed, and are admitted into the free and mild dispensation of that “grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.”—The Christian being justified by the faith of Jesus Christ, is delivered from the law of works, which commands obedience as the condition of life, and condemns the sinner for every act of disobedience: This is another part of his liberty, “for he is delivered from the law, that being dead wherein he was held; that he should serve God in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*.” The believer being a new creature in Christ Jesus, is delivered from the dominion of sin, for the power of sin is destroyed in that heart where grace reigns. “Sin shall not have the dominion over you, who are not under the law but under grace†.”—The Christian is also delivered from the authority of men in matters of religion. He is instructed to call no man master, for one is his master and father, even Christ. By his authority alone he acknowledges the conscience to be bound. Human decrees, and human traditions, how venerable soever for their antiquity, or respectable on account of the character of their authors, and though enforced by the authority of the highest civil or religious courts upon earth, if they be opposed to the

* Rom. vii. 6.

† Rom. vi. 14.

plain dictates of Christ in his word, these you ought to disbelieve and reject. To give implicit faith to the opinions and decisions of men, is to bind the mind in chains, to degrade its dignity, and enslave its energies. But true liberty of conscience is to be enjoyed within the sphere of the divine law, under the impression of the divine authority, and the direction of the divine Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is," and he is in the Christian's heart, which is his temple, "there is liberty."

Fourthly, This rule contains the doctrine of brotherly love.

This is inseparably connected with other parts of it which have been mentioned. For justification by faith must be followed with love to God and man. Thus the Apostle teaches, for "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love*." Love is also inseparably connected with regeneration; for it is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost in the heart, when there enmity is subdued. Christian liberty is without licentiousness. It allows not the operation of irregular and lawless passion,—forbids hatred and strife, but encourages friendship and love. Hence the Apostle says, "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another: for all the law is fulfilled in one word,

* Chap. v, 6.

even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*." The fulfilling of the law is love to God and man, which certainly teaches us this important truth,—the necessity of good principle to all true morality.

The exercise of love to the brethren discovers our love to God. This was the new commandment that Christ gave unto his disciples, and it is the grand characteristic of all his followers. "By this shall all men know that ye are passed from death to life, because ye love the brethren." Love to the brethren displays itself, "not in word only, but in deed and in truth:" in sympathizing with them in affliction; in relieving them in their necessities; in praying for them; in being grieved when they fall into sin, and endeavouring, with all tenderness and candour, to raise them to the enjoyment of the privileges which they have forfeited. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ†."

Having thus considered what I apprehend to be the leading parts of the rule mentioned in the text, which comprehend the principal heads of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, I proceed,

II. To describe the character of those who walk according to this rule.

* Chap. v. 13, 14.

† Chap. vi. 1, 2.

They are, in general, denominated “the Israel of God.” They are so, not by carnal descent, or by external privilege or profession; but the true Israel of God, whether Jews or Gentiles, who are new creatures in Christ Jesus, and who walk according to the truth of the Gospel.

Israel was a name given to Jacob, the head of the twelve tribes, on that memorable occasion when “he wrestled with the angel, and, as a prince, had power with God, and prevailed *.” It is a name which, in the Old Testament Scriptures, is frequently applied to his descendants according to the flesh, who were distinguished from all other nations by peculiar civil and religious privileges. And in the New Testament it is sometimes used as descriptive of true Christians or saints, as Nathaniel is said to be “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile†;” and our Apostle says, “they are not all Israel,” true Christians, “who are of Israel‡,” or descendants of Jacob according to the flesh; and in the text the Israel of God signifies those who are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, who are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people.”

Were we to insist on this general description of their character, we would be led to observe, that they are a chosen people; a people in covenant with God; a people distinguished by peculiar pri-

* Gen. xxxii. 28.

† John i. 47.

‡ Rom. ix. 6.

vileges, who delight in peculiar exercises, and particularly, it might be shewn, in the exercise of prayer.

But as I humbly apprehend that the Israel of God in the text is only another expression for those “who walk according to the truth of the Gospel,” in opposition to those who insisted on the rite of circumcision, and other ceremonial observances, as essentially necessary to salvation, so attention to this will afford a more appropriate and particular delineation of their character. The Apostle appears here to insinuate to the members of the church at Galatia, that by believing the doctrines, and practising the precepts he taught them in this epistle, which were contrary to those published by Judaizing teachers, they would not forfeit any claim they might have, or desired to have, to the title of Israel, but would more fully establish their character as the true Israel of God.

Let us, therefore, shortly consider the character of those who walk according to the rule, the principal parts of which we have endeavoured to specify.

Those who walk according to this rule, are, in general, such as coincide with it in sentiment and conduct. But more particularly,

First, They are possessed of a saving knowledge of it. This is a first principle; for a person cannot walk according to a rule of which he is ignorant. But the Christian is instructed with regard

to the standard of his faith and practice. It is clearly revealed to him in the word of truth, as you have seen, and this he is effectually taught by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Christ, according to his promise, hath sent the Spirit, "to lead him into all truth," and the Spirit of truth hath taught him that his justification is not by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. For "he hath received the Spirit not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith*." He hath also been taught the doctrine of regeneration in a saving experimental manner, "being God's workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works." He knows that a happy change hath passed upon him, by his affections flowing in a different channel from that which they formerly filled. The objects of his hatred and of his love are completely reversed. He is also made to know the doctrine of Christian liberty by the overpowering operation and influence of the Holy Spirit in counteracting the strength of sin, and in seeking its utter destruction in the inmost recesses of his heart, and in every part of his conduct. In some delightful moments "the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a son of God," and therefore, that he is introduced into glorious liberty. He is also taught, in a most pleasing manner, the doctrine of Christian charity, having "the love of

* Chap. iii. 2.

God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." This is the true saving experimental knowledge of the truth of the Gospel, which is infinitely preferable to that which is the mere effect of human teaching, of application to study, or of the exertion of the most eminent talents. This knowledge is always accompanied with the best affections, and with a suitable practice. This is the knowledge which the Israel of God possess, "who walk according to the truth of the Gospel."

Secondly, They approve of it in all its parts.

The understanding being enlightened by the Spirit, to perceive the excellence of this rule, it commands the love and approbation of the heart. The true Christian sees the will of God in all things, both in the law and in the gospel, to be right. He can say, that "the everlasting covenant is ordered in all things and sure," and, "that the law is holy, the commandment holy, just and good."

He approves of justification by the grace of God; nay, even glories in it, because it displays the exceeding riches of divine grace, and humbles the pride of man. He also approves of regeneration by the spirit of Christ, because, while it shows the utter inability of man to help himself, it displays the wonderful mercy and power of God. For the same reasons, he approves of that liberty and love which the children of God enjoy.—Now, this cordial approbation of the rule is necessary to our walking according to it; for we are not compelled by force,

but drawn by love, to a cheerful, unreserved obedience “to the good, the perfect, and acceptable will of God.” “O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day !” Having loved it, and thus having approved of it, it will be our study to know it more and more, and to observe it more perfectly.

Thirdly, They are careful in every particular to observe it. They do not run heedlessly, but walk with cautious steps.

Persuaded that this rule “is spiritual,” that it extends to the inward principles and dispositions, they wish to yield obedience to it from the heart. The doctrines it reveals they are careful with the heart to believe unto righteousness; and the precepts it prescribes they are solicitous, from proper motives, to observe.—There is no part of divine truth or duty in which they are instructed, however much it may oppose their preconceived opinions, or favourite prejudices, they would be disposed to surrender and reject. Whilst the weightier matters of the law occupy their chief attention, those which are less weighty will not be treated by them with indifference and scorn. They will endeavour to proportion the ardour of their zeal and exertions to the importance of the objects in view; while they do the greater, they will not leave the less undone. “The law is exceeding broad.” Whilst the gospel in which they are instructed teaches them, that the righteousness of the Saviour in which they are interested, and by which they are justified, is commensurate to all the

demands of the law ; that its image in regeneration is impressed on their souls, and extends to every faculty, they desire to show their gratitude to the God of salvation, and to display their new nature, by obedience to all the divine precepts, in all their extent. “ O that my ways,” says David, “ were directed to keep thy statutes, then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments.”

Fourthly, They are making progress in conformity to it.

Walking is a progressive exercise, and the word, in the original, translated walk, signifies to proceed in a regular and orderly manner*. They are not disposed to lose any point of truth or of duty to which they have arrived ; but in so far as they have attained, “ they walk by the same rule, they mind the same things.” They do not rest satisfied with their attainments, but are desirous of improving them for advancing a step further. Convinced that they are still far short of the perfection of the divine rule, they are anxiously solicitous of daily rising a degree higher and higher in the scale of excellence, until they reach the summit of their ambition.—They are indeed perfectly justified, for the act of justification is as complete at first as it shall ever be ; but they are not perfect in their

* Στοιχεισθιν.

knowledge of this doctrine, they do not sufficiently see and admire the wonders it contains ; this also must be admitted, with regard to their knowledge of sanctification, of Christian liberty and love.—Their sanctification also, is not perfect so long as they remain in this world, but He who hath begun this good work in them, will, in spite of all opposition, “ perform it, until the day of Jesus Christ.” Their views and feelings of Christian liberty and charity, are likewise daily advancing, until they arrive at that happy land, from which every hostile restraint and hateful passion are for ever removed. Thus “ the righteous hold on their way, and they who have clean hands wax stronger and stronger : The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Fifthly, They are sincerely and ardently desirous of attaining perfect conformity to it, both in heart and conduct.

Those who have a saving acquaintance with the gospel ; who have received the truth in the love of it, are disposed to obey it from the heart, and are making progress in conformity to it, will not be satisfied until they see in themselves a complete resemblance to this glorious standard. The moral image of God which the Gospel exhibits, when contemplated by the enlightened mind, inspires a desire which can only be gratified by being “ perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.” Thus, we may quote the sentiments of Paul, which all the

saints are most willing to subscribe, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus *."

III. Let us very briefly consider the blessings supplicated in behalf of those who walk according to this rule, "peace and mercy."

Peace is a most comprehensive term, denoting all that is good for us. It was a common salutation among the Jews, "peace be unto you." It was included in the benediction which the priests of old pronounced on the children of Israel; it was the blessing that Christ bequeathed to his disciples; and it is that which Paul here requests for those "who walk according to the truth of the Gospel."

Mercy is, in the text, connected with peace, pointing out the source whence all happiness flows; and probably, also, descriptive of the sympathy and aid of Jehovah towards his people in affliction. These two words, *peace* and *mercy*, are so comprehensive as to signify all that is good for the saints.

They include, more particularly,

* Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.

Tranquillity of soul, or peace of conscience. This, my friends, is a most important blessing, being essentially necessary to happiness; for how can a man be happy who is at war with himself? Peace of conscience, which is the privilege of the saints, proceeds from faith in God as the God of peace, and therefore our father and friend in Christ Jesus. It is a peace which flows from a sense of our interest in “the blood of Christ, that cleanseth from all sin; that blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel;”—*this* cried for vengeance on the murderer, *that* pleads for mercy to the chief of sinners. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This tranquillity is not like the delusive dream of the man who is saying to himself, “peace, peace, when sudden destruction is coming upon him,” but is substantial and permanent. The value of it they best can tell, who, with a conscience once aroused by a sense of guilt, and alarmed by the terrors of merited punishment, find their apprehensions and troubles removed by a believing view of the God whom they had offended, turning away his wrath, and smiling upon them in the face of his Son Jesus Christ,—of the Son of God appearing to them as their great High Priest, who had offered up for them a perfect sacrifice, and making them to feel the efficacy of his propitiation, in the blessed fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, and peace.

Peace may be considered in the social relations,

whether civil or religious, in which we are placed. The man who enjoys true peace of heart, will be desirous of diffusing this blessing throughout every society with which he is connected. Domestic quarrels and contentions, he will most assiduously study to avoid, convinced that they are equally injurious to the interests of religion and morality. He will labour to cultivate harmony in his family, believing, that this is requisite to sweeten the cup of enjoyment, and to blunt the edge of adversity. “O, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”—As members of religious society, peace is also to be cultivated, in a connection with the interests of truth. The rule according to which we are to walk, teaches us “to love one another, and to be at peace among ourselves.” A Christian society forfeits every claim to the name, where the members delight in contention, “in biting and devouring one another.” Nothing can be a fouler stain on their character; more opposite to their profession, and more hostile to their edification; for, it is contrary to all the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, and frustrates the grand end for which our Lord established his church in the world. “I would therefore beseech you, brethren, to mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learnt, and avoid them *.”

* Rom. xvi. 17.

As the general expression peace and mercy, includes all that is good for the Israel of God, an uninterrupted course of external prosperity, is not what is signified by it, for this may not be good for them ; on the contrary, there is sometimes “ a need be that they are in heaviness through manifold temptation,” and when, in such a situation, we wish mercy for them, it is that they may experience the sympathy and aid of Jehovah. O, what a blessing it is to be afflicted in mercy, to be brought into such circumstances, though distressing, as to taste more sweetly, and to feel more powerfully the loving-kindness of Jehovah ; even while the rod is applied, to see the bowels of paternal love yearning over us ! “ All the paths of the Lord,” even those which are most painful, “ are truth and mercy to such as keep his covenant.” How strikingly emphatical are those words of Jehovah concerning Ephraim, “ I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus : thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke ; turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still ; therefore my bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord *.”

* Jer. xxxi. 20.

And when we plead for mercy to the Israel of God, it plainly points out, that all the blessings which they need, and which He only can confer, are unmerited. What is it that we deserve? As creatures, we cannot be profitable to the great Creator. As sinners, we deserve nothing but horror of conscience to ourselves, and war in every society with which we are connected. If therefore we enjoy peace; nay, if we are not consumed, it is because "the Lord delighteth in mercy." Let us therefore never cease to pray, that Jehovah would glorify his mercy, by extending to his faithful servants the richest blessings, which he freely bestows through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Now, my brethren, to conclude, suffer the word of exhortation.

Consider whether you have attained the character recommended in the text. Do you walk according to the truth of the gospel, according to the rule that God hath given you? Do you know this rule? Do you approve of it? Do you delight in it? Are you careful to observe it in every particular? Are you making progress in conformity to it? Are you perfect in desire, whilst you are deeply grieved that you are far short of perfection in attainment? To possess the character of the Israel of God, is an object of the first importance, for, without this, it is impossible you can adopt the prayer in the text in an acceptable manner. This cha-

racter is surely amiable ; it should therefore be the object of your love : It is truly honourable ; let it be the object of your ambition : It is highly useful ; therefore you should be desirous of excelling in the display of its virtues.

Be earnest at a throne of grace, that you may experience more and more the blessings of peace and mercy in your own hearts. This is necessary to your praying with frequency and fervour for those blessings unto others. They who are not conscientious in praying for themselves cannot be expected to pray for others ; and those who are strangers to the blessings of the gospel, cannot be concerned that others should enjoy them. Be therefore sincere and ardent in your supplications to the Father of mercies, “ that being justified by faith you may have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ ; that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may fill your hearts and minds ; that all the ways of God towards you may be truth and mercy ; and that, in the ages to come, he may show forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards you, through Christ Jesus.”

Pray for peace and mercy, to those who are united with you in the same Christian communion. The disciples of Jesus ought certainly to remember one another at a throne of grace ; and, particularly, those who are joined with us in the same church fellowship, claim a peculiar interest in our prayers.

As we ought to “continue stedfast in the Apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread,” so also “in prayer.” As there is a more intimate visible connexion between you, than others who are not of the same communion, the law of love requires that you should daily unite in prayer, that the hand of divine mercy may be stretched forth towards you, scattering its many blessings; that you may enjoy peace of conscience, peace with one another, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, perseverance in holiness; and that by active and zealous co-operation, you may promote the grand cause which you have espoused. “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.” “Brethren, pray for us” who labour in word and doctrine, “and let us never cease to make mention of you in our prayers.”

Add to this, pray for all who hold Christ the head, and who walk according to the truth of the Gospel, by whatever name they are called. Though we are connected especially with those who join with us in the profession of the same principles, in the worship of God in the same society, and in their happiness ought to feel a peculiar interest, yet, we should cultivate love to all the saints, to whatever denomination they may belong. Warrantable, or unwarrantable separation from a church, ought not to extinguish, or even diminish our love to those who bear the image of the common Saviour; as it cannot make void our obligations to walk according to the rule

that he hath given us, so it ought not to shut against them the mouth of prayer. Partiality, prejudice, rancour, or bitterness, should have no place at a throne of grace. Let us therefore daily supplicate a gracious God, that peace and mercy may be on “all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” To such worthy characters, our prayers are not to be confined, but should extend to all our brethren of the human race. Let us never forget that we should offer up continually the fervent desires of our souls to the God of the whole earth, that all may be acquainted with the glad tidings of salvation; that the guilty and dejected may find suitable relief; that the voice of mercy may be heard in the habitations of horrid cruelty.

In fine, I would exhort you to show by your conduct, that you possess those blessings for which you pray in behalf of others. To pray, and not to act suitably to your prayers, is to be guilty of the grossest hypocrisy. Whilst you ask of God peace for others, display the sincerity of your devotion, by “leading quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.” Whilst you pray for mercy to others, be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. “Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do

ye. And, above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful *."

* Col, iii. 12—16.

DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO AVOID SIN IN
ALL ITS FORMS.

I THESS. V. 22.

“ Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

PART I.

IT was a memorable saying of Julius Cæsar, with regard to his wife Pompeia, for whom Clodius, a young Patrician of high birth and ample fortune, but of the most abandoned and profligate character, entertained a criminal passion, and when the unfavourable report reached the ears of Cæsar, he said he did not believe it, but notwithstanding he divorced Pompeia; alleging as the reason, not her guilt, but the sacredness of his honour, affirming, *that Cæsar's wife ought not even to be suspected.* Whether Cæsar's conduct in this instance be applauded or

censured by us, from it a most important moral lesson may be learned. If a heathen emperor thought it proper and becoming that his wife should be above the suspicion of guilt, ought not Christians to endeavour to act in such a manner as, if possible, to lay no foundation for others to say, that the love of sin is predominant in their character? The most spotless innocence and integrity will, indeed, be found insufficient to protect against the calumnies of a malicious and wicked world, for "who can stand before envy?" At the same time, we should improve the danger to which we are exposed, by cultivating the greater vigilance and circumspection, that we may give as little occasion as possible for the enemy to blaspheme. And therefore, it will be wise in us to pay the most particular attention to the precept in the text, "abstain from all appearance of evil."

Some commentators connect this with the preceding verse, and confine it to doctrine, but it seems rather to contain a distinct precept. But even though it should be viewed in connection with the preceding context, it will not be necessary to confine it to doctrine, for "proving all things, and holding fast that which is good," include practice as well as faith. "Abstain from all appearance of evil."

In the illustration of this subject, I propose to endeavour to explain the duty here recommended; to point out the means to be used as necessary to the

practice of it; and to subjoin a few arguments or motives by which it is enforced.

I. I shall endeavour to explain the duty of abstaining from all appearance of evil.

Evil is here obviously to be understood, not in a natural, but in a moral sense; in a word, it is *sin*, which is the cause or source of every other evil. If we judge of it from the good to which it is opposite, and of which it deprives us, it will rise, in malignity and demerit, above all conception. It is the very reverse of the moral character of God,—opposes every perfection of his nature; every purpose of his will; every operation of his hand; deprives of that image which is the glory, and of that enjoyment which is the happiness of man; and exposes the person who commits it to the dreadful vengeance of Him whose arm is almighty, “and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.”

With respect to the origin of this evil, much has been said and written, but still over it there hangs a cloud of mystery, which the most eminent of men, by all their talents, learning, and acquirements, are unable to dissipate. How sin arose among the angels of light, who were created pure, and had no temptation from without, to commit the crime of rebellion against the Most High, but had the most powerful inducements to maintain their allegiance, it is not for us, “who are of yesterday, and know nothing,” to be so presumptuous as to pretend to

determine. In heaven, however, the place of the blessed, it first had existence, and from thence descended to this earth. The angel of darkness, who with his kindred spirits, accomplices in guilt, had been expelled the regions of unsullied light, assailed our first parents, who were formed pure and upright; and with all the subtlety of infernal malice, successfully tempted them to join in confederacy against their Maker and Benefactor. They, having also sinned against God, produced a fallen race, which spread over the world, and by their errors and their crimes, soon exhibited evident and striking proofs that they were “shapen in sin, and brought forth in iniquity.”

Let us not perplex ourselves with vain and useless questions, which an impious curiosity only would be anxious to solve, for “we should not seek to be wise above what is written.” Let us cease to inquire how this evil could obtain a place in any of the intelligent and pure creation of God; why Jehovah did not prevent its introduction among his works, when he was perfectly able to do so; why he hath permitted it to spread its malignant and baneful influence over the face of this globe. Let it suffice us to know, that it is an unquestionable fact, that sin does exist—that it is an evil the most odious and destructive—that it carries in its bosom the essence of all guilt, and there follows in its train all the horrors of desolation and of death. Let us be assured, that when we look at it, it should be with the ut-

most abhorrence; when we see its appearance and approach, we should instantly, and with speed, flee from it, as from our most inveterate and cruel foe. Let us rest satisfied with first principles on this subject, which must recommend themselves to every humble, rational inquirer, that God is not, and cannot be, the author of sin. "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all," and therefore, he cannot be the author of that which is diametrically opposite to his nature and perfections; and though it be the subject of his counsel, cannot be the object of his choice, for "it is that abominable thing which his soul hateth." And let us also learn, that our obvious duty is, to hate every false and wicked way, to abstain from every appearance of evil.

This evil "is a want of conformity unto, or a transgression of the moral law of God." This law prohibits and condemns every sin, sins not only of the conduct, but also of the heart—presumptuous and secret sins. Some there are who seem to congratulate themselves when they do not run into the same excess of riot with others; when they abstain from gross and flagrant crimes; from those violent outrages against the security, property, or lives of their brethren, which, according to the laws of their country, subject the perpetrators of them to the most exemplary punishment. If they elude the vigilance of the police, escape the cognizance of human courts, and the application of human laws, feel a conscious pride of superiority, though with blasphemous im-

piety they set their mouths against the heavens, and by a filthy and wicked conversation, provoke to wrath the holy majesty of the Omnipotent, of Him who is the Judge of all.

But such self-complacency is the enjoyment of a blinded understanding and depraved heart, for not only from such shocking crimes, which are glaringly brutal, inhuman, and cruel, but also from every appearance of bad principle, and immoral practice, you are to abstain. Such a vast variety is here presented before us, that it must be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to point out every species of sin, or appearance of evil, which you are to avoid. A morose, censorious, and unsocial temper is not recommended, for while there is a season for retirement, meditation, and prayer, there is also a time for innocent recreation, for active duty, for mingling in the society of friends, of strangers, and even of enemies. When you are thus called to travel in circles so differently described, take the word of God “for a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path.” This will be your best instructor and guide, will teach you to conduct yourselves in such a manner as to encourage whatever is good and praiseworthy, and to frown on every appearance of evil, that it may flee from your presence.

We are taught by infallible authority, that “lust, when it is conceived, bringeth forth sin.” Evil principles naturally produce criminal conduct. Sin then assumes a body or a shape, in evil deeds, which

are transgressions of the law of God. From these, doubtless, you are to abstain: but the language here is more particular and specific; you are not only to abstain from palpable and gross vices, which cannot be mistaken by any man of common sense or common feeling, but also from those things which have only the "appearance of evil." In this state of imperfection, where there is such a diversity of character, it is to be expected there will be a great variety of sentiments with regard to certain actions, especially when the divine law cannot be brought to bear pointedly and decidedly upon them. There may be some things which it would be difficult, or perhaps impossible, to show that they are evil in their nature; but they may be bad in their tendency and consequences. Such things, which may be indifferent in themselves, but may prove an occasion of stumbling unto weak brethren: As when the Apostle says, "But meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat are we the better; neither if we eat not are we the worse; but take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block unto them that are weak. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend*." Every thing therefore of this description, which may not be criminal in its own nature, but pernicious in its consequences, you are to avoid. You are not, in the confidence of your own

* 1 Cor. viii. 8, 13.

powers, or in the boldness of presumption, to go forth and meet it with the airs of a hero, as if you conceived it to be only a bug-bear to frighten children, but cannot hurt, far less destroy; but it will be your wisdom, in the spirit of holy fear, and humble caution, to turn from it and pass away.

You ought to be careful to abstain from every thing which has the appearance of opposing sound doctrine, experimental godliness, or pure morality, though this should expose you to the charge of affected singularity, or fanatical preciseness. But more particularly,

First, To abstain from every appearance of evil, is to beware lest your sentiments should, in the smallest degree, countenance the infidel and erroneous principles of the age.

There is one class of men, pretending to superior penetration, who reject the Scriptures altogether as the word of God. There is another, proud of their learning and refinement, who believe the Scriptures only in so far as they appear to contain doctrines or precepts conformable to their reason. Thus they exclude from the system of revelation, the doctrine of the Trinity—the divinity of our Saviour—his atonement for sin by his sufferings unto death as the surety of his people, and other doctrines inseparably connected with these; and thus they overturn the foundation of our faith and hope for eternity. Such persons, whatever they may profess, divest Christianity of its peculiar character and glo-

ry. There is, however, sometimes a subtlety in their reasonings, and they affect such an appearance of candour, moderation, liberality, and even of piety, as is very imposing, and apt to deceive the ignorant and unwary. Be on your guard then, lest you should contemplate their sentiments in too favourable a light, be misled by their sophistry, or deceived by their insinuating eloquence. Their principles may by some be extolled as more rational and more practical than ours, but it has frequently been triumphantly shown by the defenders of the faith of Christianity, that while they are false, they are not so conducive to pure morality as the principles of Scripture, which we believe and profess. The fact is, whatever they may pretend, that infidels reject the word of God, because the system of truth which it contains does not justify, nor even palliate their evil inclinations and licentious conduct, but, on the contrary, condemns them; they therefore must discard it, and substitute in its room some offspring of their own invention, that will pass on them a more favourable verdict. Thus, says our Saviour to the Jews, “Ye love darkness rather than light, because your deeds are evil: you will not come to the light, lest your deeds be made manifest.” And what the Apostle Peter says of the scoffers at religion, who would arise in the last days, is true of all infidels. They “walk after their own lusts;” they may profess to give other reasons for their conduct; but the true cause is, that their own corrupt inclinations,

and unhallowed passions, dictate a system which will allow their gratification, and this they therefore adopt in preference to every other that would impose on them any restraint.

If, therefore, you would abstain from every appearance of evil, give no countenance to the peculiar sentiments of the infidel, or of the erroneous teachers of Christianity, by doubting of your own, or by being either afraid or ashamed openly to confess that you are the disciples of Him who is the great teacher sent from God. “Hold fast the form of sound words; hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience; hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for faithful is he who hath promised.”

Secondly, To abstain from every appearance of evil, is to be on your guard, lest you maintain unnecessary intercourse with the openly wicked and profane.

It is almost impossible for any man, whatever be his profession or occupation, if he perform the duties he owes to himself and to others, not to be found sometimes in the society of those who are the avowed enemies of all that is serious and sacred. For, to avoid this altogether, “we must needs go out of the world.” But you should beware lest you make such persons your beloved companions, with whom you delight to associate, or your intimate friends, to whom you communicate your secrets. For with all their pretensions to integrity and honesty, with all

their warmth of heart, their show of benevolence and charity, which they sometimes assume, they are most dangerous members of society. Avoid them, therefore, as much as possible ; have no unnecessary intercourse with them, for a contagious disease rages in their dwellings. Imagine not, in the fullness of your sufficiency, that you may associate with them as often as you please, without any danger of being infected by their vices, because you have formed the resolution of resisting all their insinuations, of repelling all their attacks. Such resolutions, however, formed in your own strength, as they must be, when not sanctioned by divine authority, will “ pass away like the morning cloud.”

You may excuse, or even justify your courting their society, by the fair pretence that your intention is to reform them, by administering instruction, admonition, or reproof, as circumstances may require. Your purpose is good ; but are you adopting the proper means of fulfilling it ? Are you called thus to stake your own character and profession ? How can you be assured that you shall not lose both ? It will be prudent and wise in you not to make such a rash and hazardous experiment. “ Lean not to your own understanding ;” depend not on your own strength ; but remember what our Lord hath said, “ Give not that which is holy unto dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Hold no fellowship with the

unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Reprove them,—how can this be, if you hold no fellowship with them? By pursuing a different course from theirs, by testifying against their conduct by a conversation becoming the Gospel. "Evil communications corrupt good manners. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. When sinners entice thee consent thou not; walk thou not in the way with them. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Thirdly, To abstain from every appearance of evil, is to beware lest you follow the men of the world, in their fashionable follies and vices.

Custom or fashion, has a mighty influence over the manners of society; and we should be on our guard lest by it we are led astray from the path of duty. It has a wonderful tendency both to blind the judgment and to harden the heart. What we see practised every day, for a considerable time, and especially by men of acknowledged intelligence, rank, and opulence, we are apt to think is not so bad as at first we imagined. We begin to doubt our own sentiments, as being too strict and precise, and then gradually to imitate the popular example that is set before us. There is a deceitfulness in sin.

Add to this, fashion has often given her sanction to great crimes, and made them consistent with those liberal views and polite manners which some-

times characterise the highest circles of society. It has clothed them with specious names, that what is shocking in them might not be so easily detected. Duplicity is called prudence ; fraud, policy ; dissipation, sociality ; and even that crime which pierces the heart of domestic happiness, and causes it to expire, passes by the appellation of gallantry. But whatever be the artifices, which the men of the world employ to cover the deformity of vice, beware lest they should prevail over you to your ruin. “ Be not deceived, God is not mocked.” Let not the fashion of the times, which is always changing, but the immutable standard of duty, be the guide of your conduct. “ Be not conformed to this world” in their evil maxims or corrupt example, “ but be transformed in the renewing of your minds, that you may know what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time.”

I conclude, at present, with a few reflections with regard to your amusements, or relaxations from mental or bodily exertion.

Innocent recreations or amusements, when well-timed, and kept within due bounds, are not to be condemned. On the contrary, when properly regulated, they are useful in promoting the health of the body, and the vigour of the mind ; and thus in preparing us for grave and important studies, or for the performance of the active duties of life. But, with regard to them, great caution is necessary

if you would maintain the dignity and purity of the Christian character. You are not inconsiderately to engage in all the amusements which may be accounted fashionable, though the men of the world should charge you with illiberality, with a want of all good taste and right feeling. For those amusements which involve in them the prostitution of any thing serious or sacred ; which display cruelty to the inferior animals ; all gambling, in which you consume too much of your precious time, or risk your property to that extent, which, instead of giving ease to the mind, fills it with the utmost anxiety ; instead of affording pleasure, proves a burden and a pain, ought not to be countenanced or supported by Christians. Such amusements therefore as are sinful in themselves, or dangerous in their accompaniments and consequences, ought carefully to be avoided. But there are others about which there may be different opinions even among enlightened and good men, whether they be really evil in their nature or effects ; but if they should have only the appearance of evil, it is certainly wisest and safest for you to abstain from them.

In this reading age, the prevailing taste seems to be in favour of amusing rather than useful books. Romances, novels, and plays, are now extremely more popular than real history, philosophy, or divinity. I do not mean to pronounce all those works of fiction as unworthy of being read ; for there are some of them which contain striking delineations

of character and manners, and have a good moral tendency. There are others which have the appearance of truth and simplicity, take a strong hold of the imagination of all readers, and while they are entertaining, are also instructive. But why should fictitious stories, either in prose or in verse, be read with so much eagerness and avidity by all ranks of men, while useful narration of facts, or sound reasoning with regard to the natural or moral world, is by them so generally neglected? Why should so many useless, and worse than useless, books, exhibiting, perhaps, the marks of genius, but as evidently the want of piety and morality, be preferred to productions illustrative of the sacred writings; nay, what is more, to the word of God itself? Surely this inspired volume, to a rational and immortal being, should have, in every point of view, attractions which are not to be seen in any human composition. Why then should it be so unfashionable to make it the subject of our daily study, especially when we consider that it alone reveals that plan of infinite wisdom and love which is of the utmost importance for every child of Adam to know, and in which he ought to feel the deepest interest? It is certainly entitled to have the decided superiority, in our estimation, to every production of fancy, to every human composition, whatever be its merits. "The frivolous performances," says a late celebrated author, "which daily appear in public under the title of love adven-

tures and histories, by anonymous authors, if they be sometimes innocent yet are most commonly insipid; and though, in general, it ought to be admitted that characteristical novels, formed upon nature and upon life, without extravagance and without licentiousness, might furnish an agreeable and useful entertainment to the mind, yet, considering the manner in which these writings have been, for the most part, conducted, it must also be confessed that they oftener tend to dissipation and idleness than to any good purpose*.”

But I cannot conclude without adverting a little to the amusements of the stage. There was a time when such entertainments were, in a great measure, confined to the metropolis of the kingdom, and chiefly frequented by the gay and fashionable in high life. But now there is scarcely a single town or village in which some parties of strolling players do not make their appearance, and receive attention and encouragement from persons of all ranks, even from the lower orders of society. It therefore becomes a question of importance, whether Christians, in a consistency with their character and profession, can countenance and support them? I do not mean to affirm that dramatic entertainments, in their own nature abstractedly considered, are altogether criminal or useless. The question is not, what they should be, or what they might be, but what they

* Dr. Blair.

really are? Were they formed on the purest models, to exhibit human character and conduct in a true light, “to catch the manners living as they rise,” to recommend the beauty of virtue, and to expose the turpitude of vice, they might be made a rational and useful entertainment. For it would be foolish to ~~say~~ ^{say} that the drama is destitute of charms. When properly conducted, it is wonderfully calculated to arrest attention, to captivate the fancy, and even at times to make a deep impression on the heart of spectators and of the audience.

In the licentious age of the second Charles, the stage was converted into a school for profanity and vice, and, on this account, was the more accommodated to the prevailing taste. Is it therefore surprising that a decided testimony against it should have been lifted up by the pious ministers and private Christians of that period? It is indeed contended, that the stage is now greatly purified; and, admitting this to be true, is there not still ample room for this species of improvement? So far as my information of the theatrical department extends, I apprehend, on good authority it may confidently be affirmed, that there are very few plays at present acted within the British dominions, which are perfectly innocent; very few in which impious exclamations, or immoral insinuations, are not introduced,—blasphemy of the sacred name of God,—the most horrid oaths and imprecations by the most wicked and worthless of mankind, are not unfrequently in the

mouths of the actors, and scenes which are an open outrage against all decency and decorum, are often exhibited. "I cannot therefore persuade myself," to use the words of an intelligent writer, "that any unprejudiced person will deny that the great majority of pieces commonly represented on the stage, either directly inculcate, or at least have a tendency to encourage, sentiments not only below the religious standard, but in direct opposition to the feelings of every Christian; and that to be in the habit of attending the exhibition of pieces of this character, (according to all fair and candid construction,) implies an approbation of the sentiments they enforce."

In fine, how are the amusements of the stage fitted either to strengthen the body or prepare the mind for the important duties of civil and religious society? Now this should be the great end of all amusements, and such as, instead of accomplishing this end, have directly the opposite effect, ought certainly to be abandoned. Some there are, who will complain of being too long detained in the house of God, because this is prejudicial to their health, but will cheerfully spend much more time in a theatre, at an unseasonable hour, and in circumstances not so favourable to their weakly constitution. And the man who contracts a predilection for such amusements, and is unhappy when deprived of them, must be ill-disposed for the grave and useful employments of human life. How can the mind, intoxicated with such entertainments as the

drama generally exhibits, be in a proper frame for religious duties, which, of all others, are the most important, and deserve our greatest attention? Abstain, therefore, from every appearance of evil.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON THE MEANS TO BE USED IN AVOIDING SIN.

1 THESS V. 22.

“ Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

PART II.

II. HAVING, in the preceding discourse, endeavoured to explain the duty of abstaining from every appearance of evil, I shall now consider the means which you ought to employ as necessary to the practice of it.

It has been maintained by some, that if the end be good, it is of little or no consequence what the means are which are used for the accomplishment of it; nay, that the end sanctifies the means, and therefore, if the one be good, the other cannot be bad. This, however, is a Jesuitical principle, than which none can be more false or dangerous; for it sanctions fraud, murder, and atrocities of every de-

scription. On this principle, the church of Rome may contend that no faith is to be held with Protestants, who are accounted heretics; that to persecute or kill them, is not criminal, yea, it is doing God service. But, my friends, it is not only necessary that the end you have in view be good, but that the means you employ for the accomplishment of it be good also. The word of God, while it points out the one, prescribes the other; and we are equally bound to attend to both.

In abstaining from every appearance of evil, you are not to follow the dictates of your own wisdom or prudence, the opinions or practices of other men, however high their pretensions, or respectable their character.

The Apostle exhorts the Corinthians to come out from their idolatrous neighbours, to be separated from them, not to touch the unclean thing—to disclaim all connexion with their impure rites and profane customs*. But the idea of seclusion or separation from the world, has, by the votaries of the Romish church, been carried to a most extravagant height. They have substituted their own superstitious views in the room of divine wisdom. Hence, their monasteries, which they have established under pretence of abstaining from all appearance of evil; but these, and similar institutions, have a tendency to strengthen the evil principle, to give en-

* 2 Cor. vi. 17.

couragement to vice, that it may be practised with greater security, because removed from the public eye. This is abundantly confirmed, by the melancholy facts which have been brought to light from the recesses of a gloomy superstition.

It is a maxim plain to the enlightened Christian, that every thing which hath not the stamp of divine authority or approbation, must certainly do more harm than good. However polished and specious it may seem, it is at best like counterfeit coin, that can obtain currency only by fraud and imposition. Thus while you ought to “flee useful lusts,” you are to do so, not by observing these unwarrantable though imposing forms, established not only by Popish, but by some Protestant churches; but in the way which God hath appointed in his word. To abstain from all appearance of evil, it is not necessary for you to assume the habit, and adopt the manners of the Monk or of the Nun, to bid adieu to the world, to abandon all intercourse with society, as if moral pollution could be shut out by the walls of a convent. Neither is it necessary that you associate at no time, and on no occasion, with the men of the world, for “you must needs then go out of the world *.”

What then are the means you ought to use, in order to abstain from all appearance of evil?

* 1 Cor. v. 10.

First, Study to know more perfectly moral evil, in its intrinsic malignity and demerit.

If we know not what sin and duty is, it is impossible we can abstain from the one and practise the other. Ignorance is a fertile source of crime. Hence we observe in children, whose religious education has been neglected, that the depraved principles of our nature are strengthened, habits of vice are formed, and thus as they grow in years, they are preparing for every evil work. Among those whose crimes have brought them to an untimely and disgraceful end, is it not most frequently the case, that they are grossly ignorant, unable to read or to write? Hence, the vast importance of the religious education of youth, and to this let all parents and instructors pay particular attention.

A person may easily be taught that a certain action is a crime, according to the laws of his country, and exposes to a certain species of punishment; but there is something more than this necessary to be known, in order to be possessed of proper principles of action. To abstain from all appearance of evil, it is requisite for you to know, what sin is in the sight, and according to the law, of the supreme Ruler of the universe: that it is much more detestable and dangerous than what any human laws can teach, and that it merits a punishment infinitely greater than what man can inflict. But where is sin thus to be seen? In that word which emphatically describes it to be “exceeding sinful,” in that death which the Son of

God in our nature suffered, while he bore the burden of it, and when “it pleased the Lord to bruise him.”

When sin is contemplated only in relation to man, or to human society, it may seem for the most part very trifling; nay, it may appear to the person who commits it, as sometimes involving certain advantage or pleasure, that more than counterbalances any harm which may be done to others. The secrecy and ease with which some sins may be committed, the difficulty of detecting the criminal, the possibility of making his escape from justice by flight, or, if apprehended, by the libel not being proved, and a thousand other circumstances, may present themselves to his imagination, that may embolden him to persevere in his course of iniquity. But when a person is instructed, that sin is an evil of infinite magnitude and demerit; that it is impossible he can commit it, without being observed, detected, and brought to punishment, by the Omniscient Jehovah, who is holy and righteous in all his ways—when sin is perceived in the glass of the divine law, and of the cross of Christ, then that man so enlightened, is furnished with arguments and motives to the practice of virtue, and dissuasives against vice, infinitely stronger than any that human laws can supply.

The man who knows and believes the commandments of God to be the rule of his duty, would not commit sin, though the civil government did not interfere; and though some may complain of the mul-

tiplicity and severity of the laws of our country, and doubtless they are capable of much improvement, yet there are many sins committed among us, of which these laws take no cognizance; but of this the Christian takes no advantage, as if it gave him a license to do iniquity. He is equally careful to avoid those sins which may not be marked in any human code, as those which may subject him to the severest human punishment. For it is the law of God which he regards as the rule of his duty, and which he is disposed to obey. If, therefore, you would abstain from every appearance of evil, you must study with the utmost care and attention, this law which is contained in the Scriptures. “O how love I thy law!” exclaims the Psalmist; “it is my meditation all the day. Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for thou art ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments, for thou hast taught me.”

Secondly, Watchfulness is another mean of abstaining from all appearance of evil.

The person who is ignorant of sin and of duty, is most commonly giddy and thoughtless, not aware of the many temptations with which he is surrounded in this ensnaring world, and therefore it is not sur-

prising that he falls before them. But even a person may know his duty, and yet, by a want of circumspection, not being sufficiently on his guard against temptations to sin, may, through inadvertence, the momentary excitement of animal feeling, or the impulse of passion, yield to them, to the dishonour of God and of religion, to the ruin of his own peace and comfort, and to the deep sorrow and regret of the generation of the righteous.

There is, therefore, no duty of greater importance than that of vigilance. We find, accordingly, that this exhortation is very frequently pressed on our notice. "What I say unto one," says our Saviour, "I say unto all, watch. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." And Paul exhorts the Ephesians "to pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance*."

Watch, therefore, over your own hearts, the first movements of sin there; for if you neglect this most essential department of duty, it will soon appear in criminal conduct. If you encourage the growth of sensuality, avarice, or pride, you will inconsiderately rush on every evil. You ought to watch not only against the suggestions of your own depraved hearts, but also against the temptations of the world, and of the wicked one. "As the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty," so many are still deceived. He

* Eph. vi. 18.

represented to our first mother a deceitful appearance of good,—that, by eating the forbidden fruit, instead of being the worse, she would be the better,—“be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Such is the nature of many temptations with which we are assailed. Sin is frequently painted before our imagination in fair but false colours; the hideous features of the monster are thrown into the shade; and so tastefully is the portrait drawn, that, at first view, we are struck with its fascinating charms, and are unconscious of the imminent danger to which, by our admiration of it, we are exposed. By being off our guard we are insensibly disposed to gratify the unlawful desire which it is the means of exciting.

We will be told by the tempter, that, by abstaining from certain appearances of evil, we shall only remain in ignorance of the world;—without some experience of evil we shall not be so well qualified to expose it; nay, we shall deny ourselves much pleasure and many advantages which we would otherwise obtain. But beware of making such experiments, of trespassing on forbidden ground; for how verdant and flowery soever the path may appear, which invites your wanderings, there lies the reptile full of deadly poison. Such suggestions are the dictates of unhallowed wisdom, worldly policy, or infernal subtlety, with which you are by no means to comply. The question is not, what will be the consequence of such an attempt? for although, even upon this ground, all appearance of evil is to be shun-

ned, because “the wages of every sin is death.” But the question is, does the law of God forbid such an attempt? if so, desist from it, for such an experiment must be rebellion against the highest authority, a transgression of the immutable laws of God. Even the most abandoned do not commonly yield to temptation as an *evil*, or commit sin as that which must be really destructive to them; it is as assuming the semblance of good, at least a present good; but this is all delusion, and leads to ruin. There is “a deceitfulness in sin;” against this, therefore, you ought most assiduously to guard. And never forget, there is no sin in being tempted, but the crime lies in yielding to the temptation, and this is most frequently the consequence of the want of vigilance.

Thirdly, Prayer.

“Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” Whilst you ought to be watchful against sin, you will not be able to resist temptations to it, if you confide in your own strength; hence the necessity of making supplication unto God for that assistance which he hath promised, and is ready to bestow. Watchfulness and prayer ought never to be separated. By the one, we foresee the evil, are aware of the danger; by the other, we are prepared to avoid it. The former is necessary, like the sentinel at his post, always on the look out, that the enemy may not take the citadel by surprise; the latter, for calling in the aid of those forces by which all his attacks

are repelled. In the experience of the saints, it will be found that, in proportion as they restrain prayer before God, they become inattentive to their duty, and the enemies of their souls gain the advantage over them. As, on a certain occasion, “when Moses held up his hands Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed. And Moses’ hands were heavy ; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were stayed until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword*.” So when the saints continue instant, and persevere in prayer, they become invincible, “conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him who loved them.”

Prayer is the language of dependance, of distress, of a sense of need, and is also expressive of ardent desires after supernatural aid. It banishes from the mind that self-confidence and presumption which are so fatal to the Christian’s peace and comfort. The prayer of faith looks to the promises of God, and pleads their accomplishment. Thus, in the view of danger, it inspires with courage ; in the season of calamity it affords consolation ; and in the hour of temptation “compasses about with songs of deliverance.” For the Lord hath said, “he will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able,

* Exodus xvii. 11—13.

but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Into peculiar difficulties and distresses you may sometimes be brought, that you know not what course to take, what is the good you ought to pursue, or the evil you ought to avoid. In such a state of perplexity you ought to lift up your souls to God for his light and his truth to guide you. "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths." To remissness in this duty many of the sins into which the saints have fallen are to be imputed. Thus Peter, when associating with the servants of the high-priest, placed himself in the midst of temptation, was off his guard, and, instead of cultivating a spirit of devotion, the fear of the Lord, was giving way to the spirit of the world, to the fear of man that bringeth a snare;—instead of earnestly supplicating grace from God to resist the devil, in the faith that he would flee from him, he was yielding to his suggestions, and therefore we account for his miserable fall. On the contrary, he who would wish to be guarded by the statutes of God, will be frequently meditating upon them, and praying for grace to exemplify them in his conduct. This is most beautifully and strikingly illustrated in the exercise of David, as delineated in the 119th Psalm. What a heavenly breathing after God, pervades the whole of that devotional portion of sacred Scripture! "Open mine eyes," is his prayer, "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Depart from me, ye evil doers, for I

will keep the commandments of my God. Uphold me according to thy word, that I may live, and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Look thou upon me, and be merciful to me, as thou usest to do to those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes, then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

Fourthly, Another mean which might be mentioned, is the pursuing of that which is good.

While you abstain from evil, it is not to be supposed that you are to remain idle ; for to contract a habit of indolence is the sure way of being employed in the commission of sin. Neither is it to be supposed that you are to confine yourselves to the duties of meditation, watchfulness, and prayer, but, animated by a spirit of devotion, you are to go forth into society, and perform the active duties of life. If you would "cease to do evil, learn to do well." Be faithful and diligent in discharging the duties incumbent upon you, in the various stations and relations in which you are placed, in "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." On these I do not enlarge, but proceed,

III. To attend very briefly to some of the reasons or motives by which this duty is enforced.

First, The authority of God, who is the su-

preme Lawgiver, is a reason which ought never to be forgotten by you. It is his command, plainly expressed, "abstain from all appearance of evil." You are not left to judge of the propriety, the reasonableness, or the utility of the command; it is sufficient for you to know that it is the will of Him who is infallible, and in which you ought cheerfully to acquiesce. The authority of God ought to bind your conscience, and to constrain you to observe all that he hath enjoined. "Whatsoever is commanded you by the Lord God of heaven, let it be diligently done."

Secondly, Abstain from all appearance of evil, because this is necessary to the promoting of holiness in your own hearts. It certainly is of the utmost importance for you to attend to personal religion, which cannot prosper if sin be not mortified within you, and holiness cherished. Now, by being careless about obvious duty, by thoughtlessly throwing yourselves in the way of temptation to sin, you strengthen the evil principle. But by cautiously avoiding iniquity in all its forms, by indignantly spurning it away from you, when it solicits your countenance, you show your hatred of it, and your earnest desire to "perfect holiness in the fear of God." You consult your best interests, while you thus promote the purity of your character, which is so essential to your present peace and future happiness, "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Thirdly, A regard for the welfare of every society,

civil or religious, with which you are connected, should operate as another motive to the practice of this duty. By avoiding sin, you exhibit an example to others worthy of their imitation; and in so far as it is imitated, the best interests of society are promoted. “For righteousness exalteth a nation,” or a society of whatever description, “but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Those who are not careful to avoid sin in all its forms, are spots and blemishes in every society with which they are connected. They sully their own character,—contradict their Christian profession,—make their good to be evil spoken of,—lay a stumbling-block before their weak brethren, over which they may fall to their ruin. If, therefore, you would be ornamental and useful members of society, abstain from all appearance of evil.

Fourthly, This is the way eminently to display the glory of God. As sin in its nature is the very opposite of the moral perfections of God, it must, when committed, cast a shade over their splendour. If, therefore, you would manifest the glory of Him to whom you owe your all, beware of every thing in the shape of iniquity. Let the light of your pure, upright, heavenly conversation, “so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your father who is in heaven.”

In the conclusion of this discourse, I would exhort you, 1. To be diligent in using the means of avoiding all sin. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not

into temptation." Know ye not, that your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, whom resist, being stedfast in the faith." He sometimes also assumes the appearance of an angel of light, that he may impose his stratagems with the greater success, and that he may lead the unwary into a snare, from which they are unable to extricate themselves. Know ye not the deceitfulness of your own hearts, and the treachery of the world; therefore "commit the keeping of your souls to God, in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Be continually on your guard against sin. Be frequent and fervent in prayer to the Father of mercies for strength to enable you to resist it in all its varied shapes. Never forget that it is an enemy with whom no truce is to be made. "Take therefore unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day; and having done all to stand, let your loins be girt about with truth, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Have on the breast-plate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Being thus completely armed, "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called."

2. Beware of conformity to the world, in their evil maxims or corrupt example. Do you profess, my Christian brethren, to be born from above, to be citizens of the better country, which is an

heavenly? It would, therefore, be altogether unbecoming your character and profession, to be governed by the maxims or by the example "of the world lying in wickedness." Pursue not the fleeting vanities of time, while the transcendantly important objects of eternity are forgotten or despised: let not the concerns of your bodies engross your whole attention; but let your souls be adorned with the beauties of holiness, and filled with heavenly consolations: be not cumbered about many things, to the neglect of the one thing needful: pass through this world with the indifference of strangers, whose affections are placed on their native land. Reckon it no reproach, even to be singular in goodness, but rather rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. Disregard the contempt of the infidel, the scowl of the proud, and the threats of the mighty. Though you should be stigmatised as enthusiasts, be not confounded as if some strange thing had befallen you; for it is only the enthusiasm of which Paul was accused, who could thus exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I am crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto me. Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel."

3. Remember there is "a deceitfulness in sin" which ought particularly to be guarded against. In its first demands there is much of the subtlety of the serpent displayed. The emissaries of Satan use fair

speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple ; and the more concealed the snare is, it is the more dangerous. “ My son,” says Solomon—he speaks unto you as unto children, whose hearts are not improved by experience, “ when sinners entice thee consent thou not, walk not thou in the way with them ; refrain thy foot from their path, for their feet run to evil, they make haste to shed blood.” What blood ? their own ; “ for they wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives. “ Fools that they are, to rush with such determined precipitation upon their own ruin.” He who walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Avoid bad company. Associate not with the giddy, the worthless, or profane, who are anxiously desirous to bring you within the magic circle in which they are enclosed. Their breath is infectious ; their influence is bewitching ; keep therefore at a distance from them, as from the pestilence or the plague. The history of mankind, from the beginning of the world to the present day, is a continued proof of the truth of this observation, “ be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners.” Will you then voluntarily join the society of the wicked, in the confidence of holding fast your integrity, and obtaining a triumph over them, by your inflexible righteousness ? Will you stand, even for a moment, and listen to the voice of the strange woman, who flattereth with her tongue, in the hope of resisting the insinuating power of her eloquence ?

Dangerous is the attempt. More wise and safer it is, to "remove thy foot far from her, and not to come nigh the door of her house." Hazard not yourselves on the extremities of virtue. Approach not the boundaries of vice. If you would shun death, abstain from all appearance of evil.

Behold the thoughtless youth, not aware of the deceitfulness of sin, of the progressive steps by which it leads to destruction. He first proves himself to be a froward, disobedient son—prefers the maxims and conduct of worthless companions to the salutary counsels of affectionate parents, and the virtuous example to be seen at home. He casts off all vigilance and circumspection with regard to purity of manners. He begins to think and to say, that religion is nothing but cant, hypocrisy, or a gloomy superstition. It is regarded only by men of weak, contracted minds, who are ignorant of the pleasures, and the enjoyments of human life. Imbibing the intoxicating draught, he begins to take the name of God in vain, to profane the Sabbath, to frequent the haunts of dissipation and vice. Thus wandering from the paths of sobriety, decency, and honest industry, he finds himself in want of money, to prosecute his idle, foolish, criminal schemes; he therefore begins to pilfer and to steal. In the first and second attempt he is successful, and felicitates himself in escaping detection. This emboldens him to proceed in his evil course; presuming he will always be equally fortunate, he is at length guilty of greater

outrages against society : he breaks open the shop, or the dwelling-house of a neighbour, a friend, or a stranger : he then attempts to assault, and to rob the unsuspecting traveller, on the high way—succeeds, and escapes without discovery. Another attempt is made, in which he not only assaults and robs, but murders. Conscious that he hath now reached the summit of guilt, and alarmed at his danger, betakes himself to flight, but justice pursues, and at last overtakes him. He is apprehended, imprisoned, afterwards served with an indictment to stand his trial before a jury of his countrymen. He is brought to appear as a pannel at the bar. He eyes, with deep thought and agitation, the solemn proceedings against him. The ingenuity and eloquence of his counsel, which fixed the attention of an admiring audience, are all in vain. The evidence against him is so clear and conclusive that it cannot be overthrown. The verdict returned is, “ guilty.” The judge, with great solemnity and feeling, pronounces the awful sentence of the law. Pale and trembling, the convicted criminal is taken from the bar, shut up in a gloomy cell, loaded with irons, to await the hour he is to suffer a public and ignominious death. In this dreadful situation, he begins to reflect on his past conduct ; to condemn his folly and his madness in forsaking the paths of religion and morality. Then he calls for ministers and private Christians, to give him their best advice ; to pray for pardon and peace to his soul. Thus he acknowledges that his only hope is in that

religion which he formerly despised. His few appointed days pass swiftly over him. At length the hour of execution arrives, to summon him to appear before the Judge of all. He is brought forth to the scaffold to witness the awful apparatus of death. The last prayer is concluded—the last hymn is sung—and before an eager, listening crowd, he is launched into eternity ! Let such striking examples of the dangerous consequences of crime make a deep impression on us all. Let us learn to beware of making a mock at sin, of thinking lightly of iniquity in any of its forms, for “evil men and seducers wax worse, and worse.” “Abstain, therefore, from all appearance of evil.”

But the most agonizing scenes, that can be exhibited to the senses, or depicted before the imagination, fall infinitely short of describing the demerit of sin. All that man can inflict is of momentary duration, and can only affect the body ; is therefore but a faint emblem of that punishment which the divine law denounces against transgressors. Every sin is an offence against the eternal Majesty of heaven and earth, is therefore an evil of infinite magnitude, and deserves “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” But who can paint the wrath of the Almighty ? “Who knoweth the power of his anger ? For, according to his fear, so is his wrath. Surely it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” O, then be always on your guard,

lest you offend Him, “ who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth, who toucheth the hills and they smoke”—who can easily cast both soul and body “ into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.” If you would escape eternal death, hate and avoid every species of iniquity. “ Forsake the foolish and live, and walk in the way of understanding.”

DISCOURSE IX.

ON CHRIST, AS AN ILLUSTRIOUS CONQUEROR OVER
ALL HIS ENEMIES.

ISAIAH LXIII. 1.

“ Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

“ Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” Doubtless, Christian, you will not hesitate to answer, that he speaks of your glorious Redeemer. Some, however, have supposed, that the prophet here points towards Judas Maccabeus, who, at the head of a chosen band, defeated the army of Antiochus Epiphanes, the violent oppressor of the Jews, by a splendid victory which he obtained at Edom, and particularly by a great slaughter at Bozrah, the capital of Edom,

asserted the independence, and restored the liberties of his country. But a greater than Judas Maccabeus is here. For the animated, the magnificent language of the text, viewed in connexion with the sublime description of character and of achievement, in the preceding and subsequent verses, forbids us to restrict its meaning to any mere man; and warrants us to apply it to Him, the glories of whose person, and the wonders of whose works, cannot be too highly celebrated. Let us, therefore, consider him, who is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, “the captain of salvation, who was made perfect through suffering,” who died fighting in our cause, and, by dying, gained the victory.

Let us view the church of God, or the faithful in Christ Jesus, descrying at a distance our divine Redeemer, returning from the land of the enemy as an illustrious conqueror, and wrapt up in wonder and admiration, thus exclaiming, “who is this that cometh?” And let us view our Redeemer, in all the splendour of conquest, condescending to answer, in a manner highly expressive of the benevolence and dignity of his character, “I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

I. Let us consider the sentiments suggested by the question here proposed by the church, concerning our glorious Redeemer. “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with died garments from Boz-

rah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?"

This question does not suppose total ignorance of the person to whom it refers; as if it were designed wholly for information. No: for whether we consider it as proposed by the prophet or by the church, this cannot be admitted. For Isaiah could not be altogether unacquainted with the Saviour of the world, whose coming he predicted, and whose sufferings unto death he so plainly and so strikingly described. And all the faithful know him: but indeed their knowledge of him is not such as is beyond the possibility of increase, or such as disclaims all connexion with a warm and feeling heart. When the church, therefore, contemplates her glorious Redeemer as returning from the field of battle, and thus asks the question in the text, we regard it as an inquiry, not of a cold speculative understanding, but of an inflamed animated heart. We behold a soul labouring with admiration of his person, and with wonder of his exploits; at the same time, ardently desirous of obtaining more intimate and full acquaintance with both. And, indeed, if novelty be fitted to excite wonder, and excellence admiration, this is a subject of contemplation, calculated to raise these feelings to the highest degree.

Every sentiment suggested by the question here proposed by the church, cannot fail to excite the

wonder and command the admiration of the faithful in Christ Jesus ; for it intimates to us,

First, That our glorious Redeemer had invaded the country of his enemies. If he had not been in their country, he could not have been seen coming from it. “ Who is this that cometh from Edom ?”

Heaven is the habitation prepared for all the friends of God. Hell is the destined prison of all his implacable foes. Earth is the region where his few friends are held in captivity, and where the multitude of his enemies always fight, and sometimes vainly triumph. This earth, therefore, may be designed the country of the enemies of God. It is their native country. Once it was a land of innocence, purity, freedom, and love ; but now it is the abode of guilt, defilement, slavery, and war. Rebellion against the Most High early commenced in our first parents ; and the time when it shall cease to be carried on with increasing malignity and violence has not yet arrived. This earth, as it is the abode of man, is the country of the enemies of God ; for mankind are, “ by nature, enemies to God in their minds by wicked works.” Here they spring into being, here they grow, here they are cut down. This country the Son of God invaded.—Considering him in his original character, purely in his divine person as the Son of God ; or viewing him in his divine nature, it cannot be said that he invaded the country of his enemies ; for, in this respect, his presence fills the immensity

of space, and is, therefore, incapable of change of place; but it is only as man, or with regard to his human nature, that he can properly be said to have come into this world, or to have gone out of it. "When the fulness of the time was come," he whose name is called the Word of God, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." He pitched his tent in the midst of his foes; and this was necessary to the success of the expedition on which he was sent. In this he did not display a parade of conquest, or a thirst for revenge, but the most wonderful condescension and love. Behold, He who built the skies dwelt in a tent composed of human flesh and bones: He who could claim heaven as his home, and the Most High God as his Father and his equal, wandered, for a season, in an inhospitable and hostile clime, where he had no where to lay his head: He "who was God over all, blessed for ever," became vulnerable to the fiery darts of the wicked one.

To this state of warfare and of suffering he submitted, not with reluctance, but with pleasure. From eternity he was filled with gladness in the prospect of it; for "he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." As the time drew nigh for the accomplishment of his undertaking, how transporting was the scene to his view! "Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me; to do thy will, O my God, I take delight." In this expedition, he did not act without the highest authority,

for he was divinely commissioned; “him hath God the Father sealed.” In this, he was pursuing not his own private individual views, but was fulfilling a plan which was fixed in the councils of eternity; a plan, the result of infinite wisdom and of sovereign grace. Accordingly, in the execution of it, he received splendid and repeated attestations from heaven, which signified, not only the Father’s esteem of his person, but also the approbation of the work in which he was engaged. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Now, can we contemplate without emotion, the Lord from heaven coming down to earth, assuming our nature, and dwelling among our kindred? To excite our wonder, here the greatest novelties are to be seen. Eternity and time, immutability and change, omnipotence and weakness, infinite blessedness, and extreme sorrow, immortality and death, God and man, united in one person. “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.” To command our admiration, here is a combination of excellencies—every divine attribute and every human virtue, are to be seen dwelling together in the highest perfection. Let us adore and praise, while we behold his glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Secondly, This question suggests to us, that in this country a bloody and decisive battle between Christ and his enemies was fought. “Who

is this that cometh with *dyled* garments ?” These garments were dyed with blood, the blood of his enemies; “for their blood,” says he, “shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment *.”

Who were the enemies that infested this country into which our Redeemer came? Sinners of mankind, the natives of the country, were his enemies. Wicked men, actuated by principles of infernal malice and cruelty, exerted themselves against him. Satan, the grand adversary of God and man, was the active leader of an invisible host that he conducted to the field. But these, though fierce and malignant, were not the most formidable enemies he had to encounter; sin, which had derived strength from the law of God which we had transgressed, came forth against him; death and hell followed in the rear. Such a coalition against the Son of God was truly astonishing. Heaven and earth seemed to be combined against him. Such an army would have been invincible by any power inferior to Omnipotence.

No sooner had the Captain of our salvation pitched his tent in this country, than an attack was made upon him, by a blood-thirsty tyrant, who sought his life; and from that period, till the great battle was fought, he was frequently and variously assailed by devils and wicked men. But at length the

* Verse 3.

eventful hour arrived, when the decisive contest was finished—a contest the most wonderful in its nature, and the most important in its consequences, of any that shall ever be found on the records of time. Satan, having collected all his forces, to make the last desperate effort, and wicked men, having increased in virulence and power, composed an army which stood in array against him. But there was another still more terrible. The law of God, in consequence of that sin which was imputed to Jesus, and for which he was to make atonement, appeared against him armed with the curse of the Almighty: Divine justice unsheathed the flaming sword: Jehovah thundered in his wrath, when he said, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” Then the horrors of war ensued. In this mighty struggle the Son of God fell, and then the battle was finished, but he was not vanquished. He fell to rise again. By dying he conquered: for thus “he magnified the law, and made it honourable,” and therefore deprived sin of its power, for “the strength of sin is the law.” Thus, he “finished transgression and made an end of sin.” Thus, he subdued death, having divested it of its sting, for “the sting of death is sin.” “He destroyed death, and also him that had the power of death; he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross.”

It is worthy of notice, that our divine Redeemer fought his enemies, not only in their own territories, but with their own weapons. They vainly imagined by death to vanquish him, but by death he overcame them. “Through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil.” All his inveterate and implacable enemies then received a mortal wound, of which they shall never recover.— Though such combined powers were against him, yet he fought, died, and overcame: He fought *alone*: none of those for whom he contended, and who shall partake of the spoils of his victory, contributed, either by their skill or strength, to his success. Let us wonder and admire, when we ask the question, “Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth the wine vat? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment*.”

Thirdly, The question suggests, that our Redeemer comes from the field of battle an illustrious conqueror. “Who is this that cometh, *glorious* in his apparel?”

Here seems to be an allusion to conquerors; when they rode in triumph into the capital of their own country, they were usually clothed with splendid

robes, suited to the occasion. Thus, our illustrious conqueror appears coming from the land of the enemy, “glorious in his apparel.” This I take to signify the scene that succeeded his death and burial, his splendid appearance in his resurrection and ascension to heaven, in which he displayed his triumph over all his enemies.

When in the field, fighting our battles, we behold him “in the likeness of sinful flesh ;” but after the warfare was accomplished, we see him coming forth by the gate of death, clothed with glory and immortality. He leaves nothing behind him but the garments of weakness and mortality ; and if he carry along with him any marks of conflict at all, these will not obscure the splendour of the conqueror, but, like the shades in a highly finished portrait, will serve to render the whole more distinct, illustrious, and striking.—Who is this that cometh ? Behold, he marches from the territories of the grave, like one who despises its terrors and defies its power, as one who proclaims himself sole Lord of the invisible world. He marches forth to ride in triumphal procession to the heavenly city, the capital of his Father’s kingdom. The chariot of state in which he is conveyed, is a bright cloud of the sky ; the retinue that attend him are the angels of light, these pure, benevolent beings, who witnessed the battle and the victory, and are now glad to grace the triumph. As he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, adoring hosts sung in the loftiest

strains, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory. Selah.”—Here pause a moment; wonder, admire, praise. The everlasting doors open for his reception—He enters the celestial palace, and the eternal Father bends from his throne to welcome his victorious Son. “The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

It was usual, in ancient times, for conquerors, when returning in triumphal procession to the capital of their own country, to distribute money, or valuable presents, among the multitude who attended on the occasion; so our illustrious conqueror, the Captain of our Salvation, when he “ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, gave gifts unto men.” He received the most precious and suitable blessings, as the spoils of his victory, that he might dispense them with a liberal hand unto his people, as their various necessities require. These blessings are great and unspeakable, grace here, and glory hereafter. Ought not our conqueror, thus returning from the field in triumph, to be contemplated with wonder, gratitude, and praise? Who is this that cometh, glorious in his apparel, arising from the bed of death? He is your King, O Zion—Christian, he is your Lord. “Let the children of Zion be joyful

in their King. God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet—sing praises to our God, sing praises, sing praises to our King, sing praises.”

Fourthly, The question suggests, that our illustrious conqueror returns from the field of battle not in the smallest degree fatigued or injured by the labours or calamities of the warfare, but as able to pursue his victory to the best advantage as he was to gain it. He appears “*travelling in the greatness of his strength.*”

It often happens, even with the victorious warrior, that after the decisive battle is fought, there remains for him a constitution so enfeebled, or a body so mutilated, that he is incapable of future exertion, or of pursuing his victory. But it is far otherwise with the Captain of our salvation, Christ Jesus. In returning from the field, his strength is not in the least impaired; nay, the majesty of Omnipotence is more visibly displayed than when he entered into it—displayed in such a manner as is sufficient to strike his infatuated foes with consternation, and to extinguish in them every remaining hope of ever waging a successful war. “Who is this that cometh, travelling in the greatness of his strength?”

Though the Son of God, at his death, gained the victory over all his and our enemies, and thus secured everlasting triumph to himself and to his followers, yet, in order to follow out the victory, to complete his successful operations, every thing was

not then done which it was necessary for him to do. Though his enemies were subdued, they were not altogether destroyed, and some who were his enemies were to be made his friends. To effect these great purposes, which were necessary to the ultimate success of his operations, no less power was requisite than to gain the victory at first. Hence, in the dispensations of his providence and of his grace, “he travels in the greatness of his strength.” Behold him who is seated “on a white horse, having a bow in his hand, and a crown upon his head, riding forth conquering and to conquer.” He travels in the greatness of his strength, when “he sends forth the rod of his strength out of Zion, and makes a people willing in the day of his power;” when his arrows of conviction are sharp in the hearts of his enemies, and the people fall down in dutiful subjection to him. But those who to the sceptre of his grace will not submit, “with a rod of iron he will dash in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” He rules and reigns on high with a sovereign and almighty sway—directs and superintends every event which takes place in the world and in the church, and will make all things contribute to the consummation of his gracious plans.—Who is this that cometh in the progress of the everlasting gospel, travelling in the greatness of his strength, are you not ready to exclaim with wonder and admiration? “He is the mighty God, the most mighty, who hath girded his sword upon his thigh, who is clothed with glory

and majesty, and who in his majesty rides prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness."—Who is this that cometh? "It is he who speaks in righteousness, mighty to save."

II. Let us now consider the answer to the question here proposed by the church. "I," says our Redeemer, "that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

"Let another praise thee and not thine own lips." This, no doubt, is a prudential maxim, that fallible man would do well to observe; but it does not extend, in its application, to a being infinitely perfect. The Son of God, our Redeemer, knows infallibly *when* and *what* to speak. If he utter his own praise, we may be confident that, as he gratifies no principle of vanity, neither does he exceed the truth. Nay, when he utters his own praise, as on the present occasion, he hath some valuable purposes to serve towards those whom he addresses. When Christ speaks of himself, in answer to the question proposed by the church, he proclaims that he is a just, benevolent, and omnipotent conqueror; and each of these features of his character is admirably calculated to convey instruction and consolation to his people.

In the *first* place, he is just; he speaks in *righteousness*. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If, therefore, he invariably speak in righteousness, he must be a righteous character. He comes forth from the field proclaiming

that it was not an unjust war in which he was engaged. It was just; for his implacable enemies had rebelled against God, their Creator and Preserver, and therefore they deserved destruction. It was just; for he fought and died not for himself, but for his people, as their Redeemer and Surety. It was therefore just that he should give satisfaction to the demands of that law which they had transgressed, and which he did by falling in the combat, for thus "he magnified the law and made it honourable, and brought in an everlasting righteousness." Thus, he came from the field of battle proclaiming that in what he did and suffered there, he illustrated, in the highest degree, the righteousness of God to be a righteousness essential to his nature, and inseparable from his law and government. It was a just war; for it was planned in the righteous counsel of God, and revealed in the faithful promises of his word. What was achieved and endured by Jesus, was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and was a fulfilment of the promise that "the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent."

A war may be just in itself, but those who are engaged in it may not be convinced of this, and therefore they cannot fight from principle; but our glorious Redeemer was fully persuaded of the justice of the war in which he was engaged, and therefore he fought from the noblest principles. The origin of many wars may be traced to caprice, ambition, revenge, or some other unworthy passion, but none

of these could find a place in the breast of our Saviour. Zeal for the glory of God and the honour of his law, were the noble principles that animated him during the whole period of the combat. He indeed says that "he will tread his enemies in his anger, and trample them in his fury, and that his fury upheld him;" but this is speaking after the manner of man; it means no boisterous or unhallowed passion, but a fixed detestation of iniquity, and an invariable ardent desire of holiness, of illustrating the glory of the divine character. It was this that upheld him, that supported him in the arduous and important struggle that made him "set his face like a flint, and not to be confounded, because his God was with him." Our Redeemer, with regard to principle, is not given to change, and he hath no reason, for all his principles are of the most excellent kind. We may therefore behold him coming from the field in the manner he entered it, having "righteousness for the girdle of his loins, and justice for the girdle of his reins." He comes speaking in righteousness, justifying what he hath done, and promising to do more. And what he promises shall be accomplished as certainly as that which he hath already achieved. As he is faithful to promise, so he is able to perform. Can you contemplate these things without wonder and admiration? "Behold your king, O Zion, cometh unto thee! He is just, speaking in righteousness, and having salvation."

In the *second* place, he is a benevolent conqueror. He is “mighty to *save*.” Salvation was the object he had in view with regard unto his people. While the day of vengeance was in his heart with regard to his enemies, “the year of his redeemed was come.” Behold his unparalleled disinterested benevolence ! “I looked,” says he, “and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold ; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me.” He obtained deliverance for himself ; for having done all to the approbation of his Father, “God raised him from the dead, and gave him glory.” And in this way he obtained salvation for his people ; for he acted as their leader, and in their name. And what he did and suffered was absolutely necessary in a consistency with the divine plan for procuring salvation unto them. “For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” By his sufferings unto the death he purchased salvation for his people. What blessing is there of greater importance, or in which we should feel a deeper interest ? There is a meaning, an emphasis, in that word *salvation*, altogether unspeakable. Entire deliverance from sin and wrath, and complete restoration to the enjoyment of all that is good, who can adequately describe or fully conceive ? What more excellent in itself, what

more suitable to man ! One of the names of the conqueror is “ Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins, and delivers from the wrath to come. The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This, therefore, was a contest, not of ambition but of benevolence, not for power but for good—everlasting good to us. Who is this that cometh, are you not exclaiming in admiration ? “ Behold your king cometh, meek and lowly, and having salvation.” He comes, your leader comes, proclaiming, “ behold I bring near my righteousness, and my salvation shall not tarry. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation.”

In the *third* place, he is an omnipotent conqueror. He is “ *mighty* to save.” We have already seen him travelling in the greatness of his strength, to complete the destruction of his implacable enemies ; and to communicate happiness to his friends, we now behold him mighty to secure and to perfect that salvation which he hath begun. There was not only opposition to the purchase of salvation which is now removed, and to the commencement of salvation in the soul, but also great opposition to the carrying it forward to perfection. This arises from various quarters ; from that principle of corruption which remains in the best of men, from the smiles and frowns of the world, from the artifices and assaults of Satan,

and this combined opposition would infallibly prevent the final felicity of the people of God, were it not counteracted by a superior power. But our illustrious conqueror is now exalted to the throne of the Highest, “and he must reign till all his enemies be made his footstool,” and till all his friends shall enjoy complete deliverance from every annoyance, and the undisturbed possession of everlasting felicity. He hath promised to give them a seat with him upon his throne, and he is powerful to perform. “He is able to save unto the uttermost,” to lift from the depths of misery to the heights of happiness, “all who come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession.” The enemies of Christ, who know him not, may dispute his ability to complete the salvation of his people, but none of his friends can, for they are taught to reason thus : “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” No hostile powers, how formidable soever they be, shall prevail to wrest even one of the feeblest of the flock out of his hand. “He gives unto his sheep eternal life.” On the great day when he shall deliver up his beloved charge, he will say unto his Father, “Behold me and the children that thou hast given me.”

In reviewing this subject, we are led,

1. To admire the wonderful condescension and love of our glorious Redeemer towards our guilty race. What could induce him to come into our

world, to assume our nature, with all its sinless infirmities, to encounter such formidable enemies, to struggle and to die in our cause, and all for our sakes,—what could induce him but sovereign, free, rich, and inconceivable love? Can you, Christians, review the scene, which has been exhibited before you, with cold and indifferent hearts? Can you cease to wonder at the condescension of your dearest Saviour and Lord? Can you fail to admire the glories of his person, the ardour of his love, and the exploits of his power? Will you not love him who hath so generously loved you? Imagine, for a moment, a sovereign of spotless fame and independent resources—whose dominions are immense,—whose throne is immutably fixed,—whose undecaying happiness is wholly in himself,—but, pitying the condition of some of the poorest and most wretched of his subjects, who, by their own crimes, had been reduced to such degradation and misery—had sold themselves as captives into the hands of their malicious and cruel foes; and, in order to redeem them, to restore them to dignity and blessedness, voluntarily descends from his throne, lays aside his royal robes, clothes himself with the meanest attire, and thus equips himself for the combat; cheerfully enters the field of battle, submits to the greatest privations, endures the most excruciating sufferings, fights, dies, revives, overcomes, and returns to his home in triumph—could you suppose such a story as this to figure in the history of fiction, and

to make the ground-work of a performance which would be read with avidity and pleasure? But the Christian knows that he can find the truth, and more than the truth of this, in the Gospel history—in the history of his Saviour. It records facts more wonderful than any incidents which human genius could ever invent, or human fancy describe. Will a tale of woe or of mighty achievement, involving some benevolent object—a tale which never had any existence but in the imagination of its author—awaken attention and excite a lively interest in the breasts of many, and will not the incarnation, the sufferings, and the glory of the Son of God, for the redemption of fallen man, not arrest the mind, and call forth all its energies? Yes, Christian, you know, and you rejoice in the truth, that there is not only more salutary instruction to the mind, but more entertainment to the heart, more warmth of pure affection, more luxury of genuine sublime feeling, in meditating on the life, the cross, and the crown of Jesus, than was ever experienced by the sentimental novelist, in poring over his most admired productions. Nay, the vapid raptures of the one are not once to be compared with the substantial sublime enjoyments of the other. Never cease, therefore, to admire the condescension, and love, and power of your Redeemer.

2. Admire the success of our Redeemer over all his and our enemies. Is not this wonderful, when we consider the great opposition he had to encounter? He put to flight the armies of the aliens; and

his success was only to be equalled by the justice of the cause in which he was engaged. Success in a warlike expedition has a mighty influence in commanding admiration and applause to the principal leader of it. Skill, bravery, and many other qualities are ascribed to him by a rejoicing people, to which, perhaps, he is not entitled. His success may be owing to some unexpected occurrence, or to the wisdom, experience, or courage of others engaged on his side. But here our Saviour fought alone, and gained the victory. Behold his skill ! for he confounded the plans of the wise. Behold his fortitude ! for he stood firm amidst the hottest of the conflict, and was not dismayed because of the mighty. Behold his power, for “ his own arm brought salvation.”

3. Study to know more of Jesus in the glory of his victory and triumph. He hath already come to you, who are his friends, in the dispensation of the gospel, and caused you to feel the power of his grace. You were made to bow before him, and to yield to his mild and righteous sway. But every principle of opposition to him is not entirely subdued. You, therefore, still need the continued operations of “ the Spirit of God and of glory ” to complete the conquest of your hearts. Seek daily to know Christ in the power of his resurrection, that you may be more and more dead unto sin and alive unto holiness. Pray that you may experience “ what is the exceeding greatness of divine power

to you ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, in the heavenly places."

4. The friends of Jesus are this day called to rejoice in the victory he hath won. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be glad and rejoice in it." This is the day which is sacred to the memory of our Lord's resurrection, in which he displayed his triumphs over all our enemies. This is the day that we are called to partake of a feast of thanksgiving, to celebrate the death and the victories of our divine Saviour. Let us observe the ordinance of the supper in the exercise of faith, love, hope, and joy. Let us rejoice that we are called to partake of the spoils of our Redeemer's conquest, which are here set before us in all their riches and variety. Let us cheerfully listen to the voice of our illustrious leader, when he thus invites us, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved."

5. The enemies of Jesus have reason to be afraid, for he who is mighty to save is also mighty to destroy. What an unwise and dangerous part do you act? You are up in arms against your best, your only friend; and you are in confederacy with your worst enemies. Imagine indeed you may, that you are free and happy; but all is imagination. You are, in reality, the most deplorable of prisoners, in cruel bondage to your own corrupt passions, in sad captivity

to the grand adversary of God and man. Satan exults over you as his prey. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, shall the lawful captive be delivered?" Hear, hear him, who cometh travelling in the greatness of his strength, "the prey shall be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive shall be delivered, for I will contend with them that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." Look for the promise of the Spirit, that "you may be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."

DISCOURSE X.

ON THE SECOND COMING OF OUR SAVIOUR, THE
FINAL DECISIVE PROOF OF THE TRUTH OF
CHRISTIANITY.

MARK xiv. 61, 62.

“ Again, the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

THE hour was now come when the Son of Man was betrayed into the hands of sinners. Judas, that apostate disciple, sold his master to the Jewish priests, who had determined to put him to death. Though malicious and wicked in a very high degree, they seem not to have lost all regard to character; for they are exceedingly anxious to have their infernal purpose accomplished under the forms of law and justice. For we are told, that those who apprehended Jesus, “ led him away to

the high priest : and with him were assembled all the chief priests, and the elders, and the scribes. And the chief priests, and all the council, sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death, and found none *.” They could find no true witnesses against him, for to his last moments he could boldly challenge all his enemies, “ which of you convinceth me of sin ?”

But the real claims of justice must be disregarded, when they opposed the execution of their decree. We find accordingly, that through the influence of authority, and the power of money, many false witnesses were procured, who perjured themselves on this occasion. But their declarations were either so contradictory in themselves, or, if they did agree in their general meaning, did not amount to the charge which they wished to establish against him, so that the council, though most willing, were scarcely able with any decency, to pronounce upon him the sentence of death. “ There arose at length certain who bore witness against him, saying, we heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands †.” This was a false assertion in itself, and it is probable the witnesses did not agree together with respect to its import ; but even though it had been true, and the witnesses had coincided in their evidence, it did not

* Verse 53, 55.

† Verse 57.

amount to the charge of blasphemy, which they wished to establish against him.

The high priest, provoked at the unexpected difficulties thus thrown in the way of our Lord's condemnation, was desirous to extort from his own lips some confession or ground of charge, which would be sufficient to justify their criminal procedure against him. "The high priest accordingly stood up in the midst," and with all the pomp of authority and dignity of office, "asked Jesus, saying, answerest thou nothing? what is it which they witness against thee? But he held his peace and answered nothing *." There is a time to be silent, and a time to speak; and this time was well known to our divine Redeemer. It was certainly unnecessary for him to reply to an assertion so frivolous and false. The high priest, however, persevered in his inquiry, put our Saviour upon oath, and, with all the solemnity of a judge, said unto him, "I adjure thee by the living God," which was the Jewish form of an oath, "that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God †." In the passage before us, we are informed, "Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

This was the grand question which the Jews were anxious to have decided. They apprehended he had laid claim to this glorious character, and

* Verses 60, 61. † Matt. xxvi. 63.

therefore they considered him as an impostor, guilty of blasphemy, and worthy of death. Does our Lord now answer the high priest? Yes: Whether he wished to shew respect to the authority of the judge, when interposed by oath, I shall not at present inquire; but surely, in his infinite wisdom, it appeared to be a fit opportunity for confessing the truth, which they were the more bound to believe, since it was declared in such a solemn manner. He repeats, what he had on former occasions affirmed, and what he had proved himself to be, both by his discourses and by his actions, "I am the Christ, the Son of the Blessed." Though at present they refuse to believe it, he informs the council of a time when his character would be fully displayed to the conviction of all. "And ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Whatever reference this may have to Christ's coming, either in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the power of his kingdom, by spreading the knowledge of his name throughout the earth, I understand it, chiefly and ultimately, to have a respect to his coming at the last day, when he shall appear on the throne of his glory, as the judge of all. Behold the dignity of our Saviour's character! Though, for wise, holy, and benevolent ends, he gave himself to suffer by the hands of his enemies, yet he is bold to acknowledge, in the prospect of all that their power could inflict, what he really was, and is, and

would appear to be, even to themselves. This affirmative reply of our Lord, however, instead of striking conviction of his innocence into the hearts of the council, they were so blinded by prejudice that they rashly concluded it established the crime of blasphemy, and therefore, without further proof, unanimously condemned him as guilty of death. They are now convinced of their unrighteous decree, and the time is coming when the vindication of our Saviour's character will appear most conspicuously to all.

In the following discourse, I propose, *First*, to consider the important truths which our Lord here affirms concerning his own character, in reply to the question proposed to him by the Jewish high priest, "I am the Christ, the Son of the Blessed:" And, *Secondly*, the final decisive proof which shall be given, that this is his true character. "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

I. Let us consider the important truths which our Lord here affirms concerning his own character, in reply to the question proposed to him by the Jewish high priest, "I am the Christ, the Son of the Blessed."

This is a short but comprehensive description of his character. It declares him to be the only mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, and that this mediator is a divine person.

First, He is the Christ or the Messias.

The oracles of God which were committed to the Jews, contained all the information necessary for them to know and believe, to the everlasting salvation of their souls. A most important and conspicuous part of it, was that which related to the coming of an illustrious personage as their Saviour, and not their Saviour only, but the Saviour of the world. This may be regarded as the distinguishing character of the revelation that was given to them. To Christ all their prophets bore witness. All the promises exhibited him to their faith and hope. The whole system of their ceremonial observances pointed to him, who was "to come in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." That was the shadow, but the body, the substance, was Christ.

This was a doctrine of the first importance in itself, and was, as such, received by the Jewish church. The hearts of all who were truly enlightened were fixed upon it, and by faith in it they were saved. The eyes of all the patriarchs, prophets, and saints of old, looked forward to the coming of the Son of Man with earnest desire and holy joy. And the Jews, in general, were so far instructed, even with respect to the time of his coming, that an expectation of it greatly prevailed among them at that very period of the world when "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Some recognised and embraced him in that character, as Andrew,

when he found his own brother Simon, said unto him, "we have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ *." And the woman of Samaria, who proclaimed to the inhabitants of her city, "come see a man, who told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ †?"

But though he was manifested in his true character, in the manner best suited to the accomplishment of his mission, and to declare the vanity of all earthly things; though the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures were clearly fulfilled in him, and though works were done by him which none but the Messiah could do, yet, because he did not appear in that worldly pomp and grandeur that the carnal Jews expected, they despised and rejected him. Our Saviour, notwithstanding, here asserts, in the face of the council, that he was the Christ, the person revealed *by God* to them, for whose coming they were taught to wait, and whom they were bound to receive as their deliverer.

I am, says he, the Christ, that is, the Messiah, the anointed of God. This is a title descriptive of his office, as "the only Mediator between God and man." Were I to attempt a particular explanation of it, would direct your attention to him, as the Christ who was symbolically exhibited to the ancient church, by anointing with oil their prophets, priests, and kings, when set apart to their respec-

* John i. 41.

† John iv. 29.

tive offices. Thus it teaches us, that the Son of God was, from eternity, consecrated by his Father to the general office of Mediator, and to all the particular saving offices of prophet, priest, and king; that he was invested with a proper commission, and endued with all suitable qualifications for the discharge of them. It also points out that he is the Son of Man, possessed of a true human nature, for it is in that nature only that he can be said to be anointed with the holy Spirit above measure.

Secondly, Our Saviour here affirms concerning himself, that he is the Son of the Blessed, that is, the Son of God, as it is explained in parallel passages of Scripture. God is alone entitled to the appellation of blessed, in the most unlimited sense of the word. His happiness is absolutely infinite; he hath happiness in himself, independent and undervived, incapable of diminution or of increase; and he is the source of blessedness to all his creatures who possess it.

The Jews entertained a persuasion that their Messiah was to be a person of the most exalted dignity, a person infinitely superior to man, to any creature whatever; that he was to be the Son of God, possessing the same nature and perfections with his Father. This was the idea which they seem uniformly to affix unto the phrase the "Son of God," and that they were right in their signification of it our Saviour himself admitted. Thus, on that memorable occasion, when our Lord asserted that he and his Father were

one, the Jews understood him as guilty of blasphemy, because, say they, “being a man, thou makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are Gods? If he called them Gods unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken: say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am the Son of God *?” If the Jewish magistrates were called Gods, who were only types of Christ, how much more is he entitled to the appellation God, or the Son of God, who is the great antitype, a divine person? The high priest, in the passage before us, was of the same sentiments with the Jews on former occasions, that when Jesus asserted he was the Son of the Blessed, he was guilty of blasphemy, and no doubt, upon the same ground, that being a man he made himself God. Our Saviour therefore declares, when he calls himself the Son of God, that he is a divine person; and if he had not been so, he would have been guilty of blasphemy; but he really was what the Jews believed their Messiah to be, and of this he had given them sufficient evidence, though many would not believe in him.

Christ is the Son of the Blessed God, possessed of the same nature, of the same glory, of the same felicity with his Father. Even when upon earth in our nature, he was, what he always is, and shall be, “God over all blessed for ever.”

* John x. 33—36.

How did he become the Son of God? This is a question which it would be the greatest presumption in us to attempt to answer. "This is knowledge too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it." It is sufficient for us at present to know and believe that he is the Son of God, and that this is not an official, but a personal title, descriptive of his supreme deity, of his equality with the Father.—When did he become the Son of God? At his resurrection? No: At his incarnation? No: At these periods he was only manifested to be what he was "from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman," and he was declared to be the omnipotent Son of God, by raising himself from the dead.

The Father repeatedly proclaimed, by an audible voice from heaven, that our Saviour was entitled to the appellation of his Son. "'This is my beloved Son," says he, "in whom I am well pleased." As the Son of God, he is a person distinct from the Father, nearly related to him, and the object of his peculiar love. He is God's own Son, the Son of himself, "his only begotten, his well beloved Son." These are expressions, the full import of which eternity itself will be too short to unfold to finite minds. Let it suffice, at present, for us to believe what our Saviour here asserts concerning himself, that he is Christ, the Son of God; that our Mediator is a divine person; and that he is God and man in one person.

II. Let us consider the final decisive proof that shall be given of our Saviour's declaration, that he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ; or the final decisive proof of his divine and mediatorial character. " And ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Jesus, the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power, as connected with his second coming, I apprehend, is to be chiefly viewed as having a reference to his sitting on the throne of judgment, where his dignity and authority as the Messiah, and the glories of his character, as the Son of the Blessed, shall most conspicuously appear, to the admiration of some, the confusion of others, and the conviction of all. This will be the final triumph of Christianity over infidelity.

Many and strong are the proofs he hath already given of his divine and mediatorial character, which are sufficient to satisfy every candid and inquiring mind. The various prophecies under the Old Testament, which respected the coming of the Messiah, were fulfilled in him. The many wonderful works which he performed while he was upon the earth, proclaimed him to be an extraordinary messenger from heaven, the Son of God. The miraculous events which attended his death and resurrection—the abundant effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the astonishing effects which it produced—the rapid propagation of the Gospel, not-

withstanding the formidable opposition it had to encounter from the wise, the noble, and the mighty of the world—its glorious success, in civilizing the savage race of man—silencing the oracles of the heathen—making the nations ashamed of their idolatries, their superstitions, their abominations—turning men of every climate, of every language, of every description, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and these proofs continued during a succession of ages. The institutions of the gospel observed in our own land, and indeed, more or less, in every quarter of the globe, and their happy consequences, in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. And still more abundant proofs will be given, by the progress of time, in the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom, until its boundaries shall extend unto the ends of the earth. Do we not at present see the prospect brightening before us, in the truly benevolent and pious exertions which are making by men of every rank, and by Christians of every name, for the diffusion of sacred knowledge, which shall issue in the glory of those days, “when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ?”

We would be disposed to think, that such accumulated evidence of our Lord's divine and mediatorial character, would be sufficient to satisfy all to whom it is presented. But, alas! among those who heard our Lord's discourses, and saw his miracles,

many remained unbelievers. There has been no age of the church, even the most prosperous, in which enemies have not been found, who were determined not to be convinced of her divine origin, or of the supreme dignity of her head; and it is to be apprehended that even in the most delightful period of the church yet to come, there will be some of this description—but the mouth of infidelity will be closed, and closed for ever, when the Lord shall come to judgment.

Both the *manner* and the *ends* of his coming will afford the most conspicuous proof of his character, that he is the Christ, the Son of God. His second coming will be exceedingly different from his first. His first coming was obscure and mean, but his second coming shall be conspicuous and glorious. In his first coming “he was despised and rejected of men;” but in his second coming “he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired by all them that believe.” In his first coming “he did not strive, nor cry, nor lift up his voice in the streets,” but his second coming shall be announced by the sound of the trump of God, which shall be heard in the abysses of the sea, and in the caverns of the earth. In his first coming he appeared with all the sins of his people imputed to him, that he might expiate them by his death, and purchase for his people eternal life; but he will come the second time to consummate the salvation of his saints, to raise their bodies from the grave, to make them

like to his own glorious body, and to make them, in their whole persons, completely happy for ever.

But more particularly, I observe, that the *very manner* of his coming shall be a conspicuous proof of his character.

Behold how magnificent his approach ! All nature is moved at his coming. The bright clouds of heaven, as deputies from the inanimate part of the creation, shall form the chariot of state in which he will be conducted to the throne of judgment. This will be a tacit, but striking acknowledgment, that the whole are ready to do homage to their great Creator. An innumerable company of holy angels will attend him, expressing their infinite joy that another opportunity is now afforded of gracing the triumphs of him to whom they ministered in the garden and upon the cross, and who is “for the sufferings of death crowned with glory and honour.” With what rapture do they fly, acknowledging him as their head whose commission they are ready to fulfill ! Behold “the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints,” rejoicing in the day of their Saviour’s exultation and triumph, proclaiming to all that he is the Son of God, their Redeemer, in whom they trusted for deliverance from guilt and misery, and to whom they are indebted for all their purity and happiness. Behold he cometh “in his own glory,” in all that glory which peculiarly belongs to him as God, as the Son of the Blessed. The divine perfections will be visible in him, and will shine forth through his glorified human nature, in the most tran-

scendant manner: When “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” his glory was beheld by the disciples as “the glory of the only-begotten of the Father;” how much more illustrious will it appear when he shall come with that “glory which he had with the Father before the world was?”—With that glory in which he was seen on the mount of transfiguration, “when his countenance was as the sun, and his raiment white as the light?”—With that glory which was displayed to Paul in his way to Damascus, and to John in vision, “when his eyes were as flames of fire, and his countenance like the sun shining in his strength?” Neither Paul nor John were able to bear the brightness of that glory, for both “fell down at his feet as dead.” Who then will be able to bear the glory of his second appearance? Surely it will be such as to dazzle the eyes of all the sons of men, and to overpower all their faculties, unless made capable of sustaining it. But then the saints “shall be like him, and shall see him as he is.” He will come “in the glory of his Father,” by which he shall be proved to be the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, even in that glory which the Father hath bestowed upon him as our Mediator, in testimony of his approbation of the work which he hath performed. This will appear in his coming as the judge of the world. “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me,” says the Saviour, “to give to every man according to his work.” When the Son of man shall then come,

there will be a bright display of his mediatorial glory, for he shall appear with all the authority and majesty of the universal Judge, appointed by the Father. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, and hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man." Thus our Saviour will show, by the very manner of his coming, clear and convincing proofs that he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed.

The *ends* to be accomplished by his coming will still farther manifest his character as the Son of God, and the true Messiah.

1. He will come to raise the dead.

The resurrection of the dead has always been accounted, by every candid mind, a manifest proof of divine power, although some, in the greatness of their wisdom, or rather of their folly, have magnified the difficulties attending it so much, that they have believed it to be altogether impossible. But why should we suppose it "to be a thing incredible for God to raise the dead?"

The dead shall be raised by our Saviour's almighty voice, which shall proclaim him to be God. "All who are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the re-

urrection of damnation*." He, whose knowledge is infinite, can easily discover where the bodies or ashes of sinners and of saints are deposited ; and he, whose arm is omnipotent, can easily collect them, re-animate them, and make them appear in substance materially the same, though in qualities exceedingly different. If our Saviour's calling Lazarus from the grave, after having lain in it for four days, was an illustrious proof of his divine character and mission, how much more shall his raising those who have slept for ages in the dark and narrow house—those whose bones have mouldered into dust, and been scattered to the winds of heaven, be an irresistible evidence that he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ? How complete the evidence ! for not one shall be wanting of all the generations of men that have died, from the first to the last. What myriads does this long period embrace ! But all and every individual of them shall come forth, and be living witnesses of the fact of the resurrection, and of the almighty power of Christ by whom it was effected. Those who are the friends of Jesus shall, with the utmost cheerfulness and joy, publish, in the presence of an assembled world, the faith which they professed on earth, and in which they died, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. And his enemies, who died unbelievers, shall be obliged, though reluctant-

* John v. 28, 29.

ly, to testify to the same fact. Not one of them shall then have the audacity or obduracy of heart to deny it. Even devils, who were the first in rebellion against God, and who are kept in chains under darkness, shall be dragged, by his almighty power, from their gloomy prison to his judgment-seat, and shall then be compelled to acknowledge concerning Jesus what they confessed when he was upon earth; "We know who thou art, Jesus the Son of God." How complete, then, will the triumph of Christ be over all his enemies !

2. He will come to be the Judge of all.

The Son of man shall sit on the right hand of power, on the throne of judgment, by his Father's appointment and authority. What splendour and majesty will then proclaim his divine and mediatorial character ! "I beheld," says Daniel, "till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garments were white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool ; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire ; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before him ; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The judgment was set, and the books were opened*." "And I saw," said John, "a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no

* Dan. vii. 9, 10.

place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which was the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works*." The infinite knowledge, the impartial justice, the absolute independence, the transcendent dignity, which he will display during the whole of that procedure, will clearly demonstrate, to the conviction of all, that our Saviour is the Son of God ; and his doing all, in consequence of his Father's appointment and approbation, will evidently shew that he is the Messiah.

What a striking contrast between what he was upon the earth, and what he shall be at that day ! Here, we behold him dragged as a malefactor to his trial, standing as a pannel before a human judgment seat, charged, by false witnesses, with crimes which he knew not, unrighteously condemned, and ignominiously expiring upon a cross. But, what a change ! He will then be seated on a glorious throne, the quick and the dead, devils and men, summoned to his bar, the law of his God the standard of judgment, impartial justice will be administered, and sentence pronounced upon all, according as their works will manifest their character to be. " For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body,

* Rev xx. 14.

according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." With what unutterable joy will he say to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world!" With no feeling of personal resentment towards his implacable enemies, but, on the contrary, while he who wept over Jerusalem hath still a compassionate heart, he will commiserate their fate, when he shall pronounce on them the sentence of the law, "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." How solemn, how awfully impressive will be the important, the irrevocable transactions of that day! How shall Judas that betrayed him, the false witnesses that accused him, the judge who condemned him, the Jews who crucified him, the unbelievers who rejected him in every age, be confounded and overwhelmed in despair! "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." But how will the righteous rejoice, for the day of their redemption has dawned upon the universe of God!

3. He will come to consummate the happiness of his friends, and the misery of his enemies, which will further prove, to the conviction of all, his divine and mediatorial character.

"He will appear, the second time, without sin unto salvation," to complete the salvation of his people, to make them, in their whole persons, as full of happiness as they are capable of enjoying. Their

bodies will be made glorious and immortal, like the glorious body of Christ, and will be reanimated by their pure and perfect spirits. "They shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall for ever be with the Lord." Then Christ "shall see of the travail of his soul," in all its extent, and in all its glorious fruits, "and be satisfied." Then all the ransomed company shall enjoy the blessings purchased by their Redeemer, to their infinite satisfaction and delight. Then the objects of their faith and hope shall be completely realized, faith will be swallowed up in vision, and hope in enjoyment, unless the full undecaying assurance of the everlasting continuance of their happiness will still imply the existence of both. Christ will then "be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe," for they shall have the most sublime and convincing, even the fullest experimental proof, that he is the Son of God, the Messiah in whom they trusted, "that he is the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."

He will come to complete the misery of all his enemies, which will be an awful and striking display of his character. This will be the time of the final execution of the sentence on the devil and his angels. They who kept not their first estate, are represented "as reserved in chains under darkness, until the judgment of the great day;" like convicts, they are bound over to the day of execution. Their misery, though at present great, is not

so great as it shall then be. Of this devils themselves are convinced, for some of them cried out, concerning the Saviour, while he was upon the earth, "what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God, art thou come to torment us before the time*?" Then the sentence shall be executed upon them in all its extent. They shall be cast into the lake of fire, shall be shut up in a dungeon, where the power of him whom they hate and blaspheme shall be displayed in all the awful horrors of eternal justice. Then the infernal pleasure of tempting the righteous to sin shall be denied them. Then all hope of adding to the number of the wretched shall be finally cut off. Then all the success, of which they sometimes vainly triumphed, in their opposition to God, to his cause, and to the souls of men, shall fall, with redoubled violence, on their own heads. Then, without intermission, and without end, they shall suffer the due reward of their deeds. Then they shall be forced to acknowledge, from the most agonizing experience, we know that thou art Jesus the Son of God, for the time is now come for thee to torment us.

The misery of wicked men shall then also be completed. Their souls, immediately after death, are consigned to the abodes of woe, for "the rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." The anguish of re-

* Matt. viii. 29.

morse and despair which they now feel, who can describe? But it is not so great as it shall be after the resurrection and the final judgment. Then their bodies shall, with the utmost horror, rise from their graves, be reunited to their souls, exhibit a most frightful spectacle, and be doomed to suffer together “the vengeance of eternal fire.” They shall acknowledge the justice of the sentence, and the divine character of him by whom it is pronounced and executed. For “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them who know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

But on these awful realities I do not further enlarge. Enough, I trust, has been said to show that our Saviour is the Messiah, the Son of God.

To conclude: The character of our Saviour demands our admiration and praise. He is a divine person, clothed with all the honours of the one Mediator between God and man. He who was born of the virgin, is the mighty God. He who agonized in the garden of Gethsemane, is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. He who was crucified on Calvary, is the Lord of glory. Of this he hath already given us the most abundant and satisfactory proofs, and these will increase with the progress of time, till at length their light will be so overpowering as to pro-

duce conviction in all. Let us therefore adore and admire him, and give him the glory which is his due. Let us trust in him, for he is mighty to save and to destroy.

Let none be ashamed of the cross of Christ. His death was no degradation of his dignity, no dishonour to his name. On the contrary, it was necessary to the fulfilment of his engagements with his Father, to the illustration of his character, as the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed. His being clothed with our nature, and his suffering in it, did not deprive him of any of his original glory; it was merely a shade which covered it for a time, that it might come forth, like the sun from under an eclipse, with greater brightness. This began to appear at his resurrection; to shine forth with additional lustre at his ascension into heaven, and when he sat down at the right hand of God; but it will burst forth in meridian splendour, when "he shall come in the clouds, with power and great glory." To his coming, therefore, my Christian friends, let your faith and hope be directed. This will arm you with patience under every trial; inspire you with courage when danger threatens, make streams of consolation to flow into your souls in the prospect of death and the grave, and "put a new song in your mouths, even the Lord to magnify." Who would not triumph in the humiliation and death of the Saviour? "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Is there a single individual

who is ashamed of Christ, of his cause and interests in the world? Let him listen to this alarming declaration, “Whosoever,” says the Saviour, “shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory, in the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels.”

Let us contemplate the felicity of those who are the friends of Jesus. They are happy now, and their happiness is in continual progress. They are happy now, for they have faith in him through whom they are justified; and “there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” They are happy amid all the evils of life, for their God and Father hath appointed these for them, and dispenses them in measure, and on occasions, best calculated to promote their spiritual good. The sources of their joy are always full and overflowing, and therefore they can glory even in tribulation. They are happy in the hour of death, for then their souls go to be with Jesus, to behold his glory. Their happiness will still increase, for their bodies, which have long dwelt in the dust, shall awake to immortal life, and sing the high praises of God. They shall be happy when Christ “shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” They shall be happy throughout eternal ages, for “they shall be for ever with the Lord.” Shall their happiness then be arrested in its course? No; for the objects of their contempla-

tion, and the sources of their enjoyment, are boundless, and their capacities are susceptible of continual expansion, though always coming infinitely short of comprehending the immense field of their observation and delight. “For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” But it is high time that we close a scene which, more especially in this state of imperfection, is so far beyond the grasp of our faculties.

But when believers in Christ shall be happy, unbelievers shall be miserable. Ye sons of infidelity, ignorance, prejudice, and the love of sin, have blinded your minds, and hardened your hearts. Thoughtlessness, or indifference about religion, may be the element in which you move; and you may be indulging the vain expectation that in the course you are pursuing no evil shall ever befall you; but if you continue in your present situation, the time is coming when you shall be seized with dreadful alarms. What will you do when death shall rouse you to consideration, and extinguish your imaginary hopes? How will you feel when you shall be summoned to appear before the judgment seat of Him whom you have despised? With what anguish shall you be filled when your souls shall be driven into the place of torment? With what horror when your bodies shall be raised to meet the Judge of all?

With what inconceivable agony shall you hear the sentence pronounced upon you, in the execution of which both soul and body “shall be cast into hell fire?” O! be alarmed of your danger before it be too late, and believe in the once crucified but now glorified Redeemer: for “he is exalted a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins.” “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Profligate and abandoned though you be, though you have long been despisers of the gospel, you have no reason to despair of mercy. For Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed, and “is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession.” Look up to God that he would give you faith to come to the Saviour, “and whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out.”

DISCOURSE XI.

 ON JEHOVAH THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD.

PSALM XLVIII. 14.

"This God is our God, for ever and ever."

WHERE is the happy man to be found? Not among the crowd of fools who say in their hearts there is no God, no providence, no judgment, no future state, no eternity. The system which they have adopted is fearfully gloomy and revolting: it expels from the universe an intelligent cause, classes us with the material world that we inhabit, and reduces us to a level with the beasts that perish. Where is the happy man to be found? Not among the candidates for the honours and emoluments of a present life;—not among the sons of riot and dissipation, who follow the dictates of their own depraved inclinations, or the impulse of their unhallowed passions; for their career, how joyful and

triumphant soever it may appear in their own eyes, will issue in miserable disappointment and irretrievable ruin. Where is the happy man to be found? Not even among the ranks of philosophers, who extol the dignity and powers of human nature as perfectly sufficient to give them all the necessary information concerning the supreme Being—their duty and their felicity. From the heights of their pride they indignantly spurn away from them, as too humiliating, the idea of being indebted for instruction to a supernatural revelation. On their own chosen fields of discovery they love to stray, groping their way among the sparks of their own kindling, whilst they studiously exclude from them the only light from heaven which can show the path to immortality. Nature, throughout all her works, gives signs of woe, tells us in language sufficiently plain and striking, that we are sinners, have offended our Maker; but a profound silence reigns with regard to the manner of our being saved or reconciled to God. How can man be happy while he confines his wanderings to those regions where nothing but guilt and misery are spread before him?—Where then, do you say, is the happy man to be found? Within the hallowed pale of the church of the living God; among those who are highly favoured with his holy, heavenly word, have given it a suitable reception, believed and appropriated it to their souls. Such persons may attain not only a probable hope, but the full assurance of their inter-

est in Jehovah, which is amply sufficient to support them amid all the trials and afflictions of life,—in the prospect of death and eternity. “For this God is our God for ever and ever.”

By whom were these words originally spoken? By a people to whom God had given a special revelation of his character and will,—by those members of the Jewish church who had believed it, and found it to contain all that was most important, interesting, and suitable to them, as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth, who were seeking a better country, which is an heavenly.” And why may not we, whose privileges are still greater than theirs, adopt the same language, “This God is our God for ever and ever?”

In the following discourse, all that is proposed is, to consider the believing declaration of the church or people of God, as here expressed, “This God is our God for ever and ever.”

I. Jehovah is the God to whom this declaration refers.

This God,—what God? He is not to be recognised among the multitude of the heathen gods, who cannot afford the smallest aid to their deluded votaries. “Their idols are silver and gold, the works of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through

their throat. They that made them are like unto them ; so is every one that trusteth in them *.” But this God is the uncreated Jehovah, the maker of all things. Eternity is filled with his duration, and immensity with his presence. His wisdom planned, and his power brought into existence, the heavens and all their hosts, the earth, the air, the sea, and all their varied inhabitants. He is the God before the glory of whose infinite perfections all created splendour disappears : “ he commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, he sealeth up the stars.” This God, who created, upholds and preserves all things. His presiding agency is every where to be seen, while He himself is invisible. “ The heavens declare his glory, the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge of him.” The rolling year is full of this God. We see his beauty in the spring, his splendour in the summer months, his goodness in the fruits of autumn, and his power in the dreary desolations of winter. We hear his dreadful voice in the thunder, we see his rapid flight in the lightning,—he rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. All nature, in the operation of her laws, acknowledges the sovereign dominion of the great Creator who hath established them, and who can continue, suspend, alter, or annihilate them, according to his pleasure.

* Psalm cxv. 5,—8.

This God is not only the God of nature but also of providence. He sits undisturbed and undismayed upon the throne of the universe; while he looks down with an unslumbering eye on all that passes on his footstool; and not only the inanimate and irrational creation obey him, but the angels of light, and the fallen spirits of darkness,—the souls of just men made perfect in heaven, and all mankind upon earth, high and low, rich and poor, good and bad, are to be found within the unmeasured circle of his dominions, to every part of which his irresistible power extends. He holds the reins of universal government with a steady hand; and when his good creatures, voluntarily and cheerfully “hearken to the voice of his word, and fulfil his commandments,” the most perverse and wicked shall not be able, by all their malignity and violence, to frustrate his designs, or defeat the grand objects of his administration. For he is the Lord God, “who doth whatsoever pleaseth him in the army of heaven; and among the inhabitants of this earth none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?” Even the devils in hell are subject to his controul, are constrained to acknowledge his sovereignty and his might; and “he makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of his wrath he will restrain.” Thus it is that his church and people are not without sufficient protection amidst the most imminent danger. When their foes are most numerous and formidable, threatening their immediate destruction, he can easily strike terror

into their hearts, and paralyse their arms. “When God arises his enemies are scattered, and they who hate him flee before him. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled, they were troubled and hasted away.”

This God, who is transcendently great and glorious, is also infinitely good and gracious. From eternity he formed a purpose of mercy with regard to our fallen race, in consequence of which he hath, in time, founded Zion, established a church upon earth. “This is the city of our God,” where he dwells in a peculiar manner. He hath said concerning Zion, “this is my rest, here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” Surely we ought to think of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.” We ought to make it the subject of our serious and diligent study. We ought to think of thy loving kindness in its origin; of thy adorable sovereignty, in laying our help upon thine own Son, who is mighty to save:—in its progress, from the revelation of the first promise to the present day:—in its wonderful effects on mankind, in civilizing the barbarous, instructing the ignorant,—pardoning the guilty,—sanctifying the polluted,—setting free the captive,—raising the wretched from the depths of misery into which they

sunk themselves by a voluntary apostacy, to the heights of happiness; and in the still more abundant effects which shall be produced by means of the circulation of the Scriptures, and the preaching of the gospel, accompanied by the Spirit, “when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” What an unspeakable gift of love, O God, is the gift of thy Son, to redeem us from guilt and misery! To redeem us, in a perfect consistency with the rights of justice, the honour of thy law, and the dignity of thy government. How wonderful! that thou shouldst give thy Son, “thine only begotten and well beloved Son,” to be our surety, to suffer and to die for us, that judgment might be executed upon sin, while mercy is extended to the sinner. Ought not this to call forth our admiration, our gratitude and our praise, for ever and ever? In the mean time, let us adopt the song of the church, as recorded in the Psalm before us. “According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.” Blessed be Jehovah, because he hath given us his holy word for the rule of our faith and practice,—hath appointed ordinances to be observed by us,—and laws for the government of his church. Let us “walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Let us mark well her bulwarks,

and consider her palaces ; that we may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide even unto death.”

II. In this declaration, the church claims a peculiar interest in this God. “ This God is *our* God.”

It is worthy of remark, that the word in the original translated God, is in the plural number *, and there can be no doubt but it applies to the true God, as in many other passages of Scripture. It thus recognises the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity in the unity of the Godhead. Without this doctrine, the covenant of grace can neither be understood nor explained, for it lies at the foundation of the whole scheme of human redemption.—This is a revelation of God, of which no trace can be discovered by the light of nature. It is peculiar to the Scriptures, and was made known to the Old, but more clearly and fully to the New Testament church. While Israel was called to believe that the Lord their God was one Jehovah, they were also taught to expect, according to the covenant revealed to them, the coming of their Messiah, who was the Son of God, and “ set up from everlasting from the beginning, or ever the earth was,” and the spirit was promised to be poured out upon them, for their instruction, edification, and comfort. And the New Testament church are called to believe in the Father,

* אלהים

the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in whom they are baptised.

While all the external works of the Deity are common to the three persons, there are, in the economy of redemption, certain offices or works, peculiar and appropriate to each. The Father, according to the tenor of the everlasting covenant, sent the Son to fulfil his engagements as the surety of his people. The Son, being thus sent, did so—by magnifying the law and satisfying divine justice for them—by his obedience, in our nature, unto the death. And the Spirit is sent, by the Son, to apply the blessings of the purchased redemption to our souls; “to take of the things of Christ, and to shew them unto us.” It is this redeeming God, in covenant, who is our God.

This covenant was revealed to Abraham, to Moses, to the children of Israel. Jehovah was their God in a manner in which he was not the God of other nations. He is the God of all by creation, by preservation, by government; but he is the God of his chosen people in a peculiar sense, as he is engaged, by the everlasting covenant, to interpose for their deliverance from guilt and misery, and to restore them to purity and happiness. But is it not presumption in “man, who is a worm—in the son of man who is a worm—man who is sinful dust and ashes,” to claim the great and holy Jehovah as his own peculiar property? It would be the highest presumption to do so without a divine warrant. But

surely, instead of being criminal audacity, it becomes our indispensable duty to give our assent to the declaration of Jehovah, when, in the everlasting covenant, he says, “ I am the Lord your God ;” to believe his promise, for this is the covenant I will make with you in these days, “ I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”

Great, no doubt, unspeakably, inconceivably great, is the gift which is here promised—truly wonderful the condescension and love displayed in it ; for what can God give more than himself to man, guilty man, who deserved to be banished from his favour for ever? But great as the gift of himself is, God knows that nothing less can be a suitable portion to the soul that he hath made, nothing less can fill its immense capacities, or satisfy its boundless desires. Let us not, therefore, under the disguise of humility, cherish a spirit of unbelief, but let us receive Jehovah as he offers himself to us ; let us believe the declarations and promises of the new covenant ; let us say, “ this God is our God.” This is the God whom we have chosen for our portion. This is the God whom we love with all our hearts, for he hath shown himself gracious unto us. This is the God in whom we place our confidence for all that we need. This is the God in whom we glory. “ Other lords and gods have too long had the dominion over us, but, from this time forth, we will make mention of his name.” This God is our God, what can we say more? This is an honour that believers only can claim, a happi-

ness which they only can enjoy It is beyond description, above all praise. This God is our God,—all the divine persons are ours. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our Father. God the Son is our Saviour, who hath bought us with his blood. God the Holy Spirit is our monitor, our guide, our sanctifier, our comforter.—All the divine perfections are ours, and are engaged to promote our felicity. The divine wisdom is ours, to direct us in all our difficulties,—the divine power is ours, to protect us amid every danger,—the divine mercy is ours, to sympathise with us in every trial,—the divine goodness is ours, to supply all our wants,—the divine justice is ours, to vindicate our cause, and to render a recompense to our enemies—the divine faithfulness is ours, to accomplish, in our experience, “the exceeding great and precious promises,”—the divine immutability is ours, as the firm foundation of our hopes,—and the divine eternity is ours, as the date of our happiness.—“This God is our God,” he is to us what he is to himself, the source of felicity, and this source is infinite, always full and always overflowing. “Whom have I in the heavens but thee,” may every believer say, “and there is none in all the earth whom I desire besides thee; my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

III. This declaration expresses the perpetuity of the church's claim. This God is our God *for ever and ever*.

How long will he be our God? As long as he exists, and as long as we shall exist, that is, to all everlasting. What an overwhelming, but at the same time, what a delightful thought! It is eternity that crowns the privileges of the saints. Great as these are, were they only continued for a limited period, the greater would be the loss when that period expired. In proportion to the measure and degree of happiness must be the misery, when that happiness ceases to be enjoyed. But such a dismal change believers have no reason to fear. Are we formed for immortality, are we destined for eternity? The portion allotted for us, and which is given us, is commensurate with that duration; for it is God himself, and "he liveth for ever and ever." "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." We read and we hear of the death of the saints; but, speaking according to the language of the Saviour, they never die. That which we call death, deserves not the name when applied to them, for so far from proving the extinction, or even the interruption, for a moment, of their holy and happy existence, it is the appointed way, though dark and mysterious, by which they are introduced into the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. All of them who have gone from this earth, in the ages that are past, are alive and well in the consummation of their wishes and their hopes, and shall continue to be so for ever and ever.

God liveth to be their God, and as he never had a beginning, so he shall never have an end. As he is eternal and unchangeable in his nature, so also in his love unto his people. The covenant, according to which he hath disposed of himself, is an everlasting covenant. The condition of it is fulfilled by the blood of his Son, the only Mediator; and this blood has obtained for them “eternal redemption.” Its virtue is infinite—its efficacy never decays—its power to save is not in the least diminished by all the multitudes to whom it has been successfully applied; and this secures their everlasting continuance in the enjoyment of God as their portion. Add to this, Jehovah having thus, in a manner honourable to all his perfections, given himself to his people, of this gift, great as it is, he never can repent—the unspeakable blessing bestowed, he never can recal; for the same reasons that induced him thus to make them happy, remain in all their force to perpetuate their felicity. This purpose is not to be altered by any event that can take place in time, for what is there he did not foresee, and against which he could not provide? And the endless progression of revolving ages, instead of diminishing, will increase their enjoyment.

What abundant reason have we to exclaim, “happy is the people who is in such a case as this; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord!” What a never failing source of consolation is this, amid all the vicissitudes of this passing scene, and in the prospect of the eternal world! As we pur-

sue our journey through life, we feel the strength of our bodies, and even the vigour of our minds, beginning to decay. While we look around us, we see all nature in perpetual change. We see day and night rapidly succeeding each other—the revolution of the seasons—years rolling on—“the fashion of this world passing away.” We feel the parting pang when we take the last look of our dear friends or relatives, as they disappear from the face of the earth; and we anticipate the change of our own existence by death, which hath already made many stages of advance upon us. To adopt the sublime and apposite language of an elegant author, “we are witnessing changes every day amid the circle of our acquaintances: we go back in imagination, and find that such in every generation has been the lot of man: we look forward, and we see that to such end all must come at last. We lift our desponding eyes in search of comfort, and we see above us One who is ever the same, and of whose years there is no end. Amid all the vicissitudes of nature, we discover that central Majesty in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. We feel there is a God,” and that this is our God, “and from the tempestuous sea of life we hail that polar star, to which a sacred instinct hath directed our eyes, and which burns with undecaying ray, to lighten us among all the darkness of the deep*.” This God is our God for ever and ever.

* Dr. Alison.

This subject teaches us,

1. What an invaluable gift the Scripture is, and how diligently it ought to be improved by us. It is this alone which reveals to us the gracious character of God—what our duty is—and in what our true happiness consists. It shews us the firm foundation of our faith and hope; tells us of another and a better world, when this shall have passed away; and bids us “look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal.” What enemies, therefore, to human happiness must those persons be, who would deprive us of it? By an impious hand they would throw us back into the midnight gloom of pagan ignorance, error, superstition, and abominations,—would dry up all our sources of consolation in this vale of tears; would send forth “a killing frost” over the flowers and fruits of paradise, and extinguish the only light that points out the way unto it. The Scriptures contain the gospel of the grace of God, which reveals to us the only valuable knowledge; proclaims the pardon of our sins by the blood of Jesus; the sanctification of our hearts by his Spirit; dispenses comfort amid all “the thousand ills which flesh is heir to,” and opens the glorious prospect of life and immortality beyond death and the grave. O then, how precious should the word of God be to us! “more precious than thousands of gold and silver.” We should esteem it “more than

our necessary food." We should peruse it carefully, and meditate upon it day and night. It should "dwell in our hearts richly in all wisdom," that we may know in our happy experience that "the statutes of God are our song in this house of our pilgrimage, that they are a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path."

2. What gratitude is due to God for the institution of the ordinances of the Gospel. It is in the church where God dwells in a peculiar manner, where he reveals his new covenant character, and where he is contemplated and enjoyed by his people. Accordingly their language is, each for himself, "one thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." In the preaching of the everlasting gospel we hear this joyful sound, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will to men." That "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: for he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And these delightful truths are, in a symbolical manner, represented to our faith in the ordinance of the supper. This is one of the seals of the covenant in which Jehovah appears as our God. Do we not see here abundant reason for a song of gratitude?

“ O Lord we will praise thee : though thou wast angry with us, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst us.” Here we see strikingly exhibited, by sensible signs, how the Son of God, our Mediator, interposed from eternity for our relief ; how he engaged to become our surety—to assume our nature—to suffer and to die in our room ;—how, through his humiliation, we are raised to honour—through his poverty we are made rich—through his being made a curse we inherit the blessing—through his death we enjoy eternal life : in short, through his mediation God comes down to us, and we are brought back to God. It is only in the cross of Christ that Jehovah appears as our God—that the clouds of wrath, which our sins have gathered around him, are dispelled, and that he “ lifts upon us the light of his countenance.” How should we rejoice and give thanks to God for this ordinance, that is so admirably calculated to introduce us to the enjoyment of himself, as our friend and as our portion ! How many of the saints, at the table of the Lord, have experienced the most sublime delights—have said, in the full assurance of faith, “ truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ;”—have said, how venerable, how pleasant is this place, “ surely this is none other than the house of God ; this is the gate of heaven.” This God is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide even unto death.

3. Some there are who ridicule the joys which spring from faith in the Gospel as nothing but the dream of enthusiasm; and consider the Gospel itself, with all the precious blessings that it offers to them, as unworthy of their reception: they seem to be persuaded of nothing but what they see, and wish to reduce every thing to the level of their own gross conceptions and feelings. Are there any whom I now address of this description? any who, instead of being inclined to choose Jehovah as their God, are determined to reject his counsel against themselves—to prefer the objects of sense and of time to those which are spiritual and eternal? O! think for a moment what will be the consequence of such a course. What are the great advantages you thus promise to yourselves? “Will your unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” No: Jehovah will be God, though you should be atheists; Jesus of Nazareth will be the true Messiah, though you should be infidels; Christianity will be true, though you should regard it as a cunningly devised fable; holiness will be essential to happiness, though you should “walk in the sight of your eyes, and in the ways of your hearts; and, heaven will be the place of sublime and everlasting enjoyment to the righteous, though you should sink down into the depths of hell. Death will soon seal the inheritance of wrath that you have chosen, will call you to judgment and to eternity, though you should

wilfully shut your eyes against every thing but the vain shew that has captivated your senses ; “ God must be true, though every man should be a liar.” Now the faithful God hath declared, “ he that believeth shall be saved : he that believeth not shall be damned.” The sound of these last words is truly dreadful, but they are spoken with a merciful design. The voice of love is to be heard, even in the threatenings of the divine law, for they are salutary warnings unto the wicked “ to forsake his way, and his thoughts, and to turn unto the Lord, who will have mercy, and to our God, who will abundantly pardon.” Such is his love, that he hath given his only-begotten and well-beloved Son to die for sinners of our race. He exhibits his Son to you in the Gospel, as the only Saviour, and calls upon you to trust in him for salvation from guilt, pollution and misery. “ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Listen to these encouraging invitations ; they are free, explicit, and unlimited :—“ Ho every one that thirsteth, come unto the waters : and the Spirit and the bride say come : and let him that heareth say come : and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

DISCOURSE XII.

ON THE FUTURE HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

PSALM XVII. 15.

*“ As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness :
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”*

HAPPY is the man who is in such a case as this ! For, by faith he hath obtained the victory which overcometh the world ; in the midst of tribulation he triumphs, and in the prospect of dissolution rejoices in hope of the glory of God.

This happiness was the portion of David, the king of Israel, at a time when it might have been expected he would have been overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay. Then he was not seated peaceably on his throne, enjoying confidence in his subjects as loyal and obedient, nor were the gates of the sanctuary open unto him, that without moles-

tation and alarm he might observe the public worship of his God, in which he experienced so much delight; but it was when he was reduced to great distress, exposed to imminent danger, from “the wicked that oppressed him, from his deadly enemies who compassed him about.” It is highly probable this refers to his being persecuted by Saul, and by those who joined in conspiracy with him, and particularly, when they appeared so formidable, that he was obliged to make his escape from the city, and to seek refuge in the wilderness; for they hunted for his life with malignant subtlety and ferocious cruelty, “like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.”

Is any person afflicted? let him pray. This was the exercise of the man after God’s own heart. Conscious of his integrity, and of the uprightness of his cause, he prays that the Lord would disappoint his enemies, and grant him deliverance. Wicked and ungodly though they were, he properly views them as permitted and raised up by a mysterious Providence to fulfil his purposes, as instruments in his hand, which he would throw aside when he had no more work for them to accomplish; and though they should be prosperous and successful for a season, their felicity is not to be envied, for it is carnal in its nature, short in its duration, and miserable in its consequences. “Arise, O Lord, disap-

point him, cast him down : deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword : from men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure : they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

What a noble portrait ! what an exalted figure do the righteous make, when contrasted with the mean and sordid character of the wicked ! How striking the difference between the sweet singer of Israel, who could tune his harp to the strains of heaven in any earthly situation, and those whose views were confined to a present life ? His eye is not dazzled, nor his imagination carried away by the gilded vanities of time, but his faith and hope are fixed on the real, substantial, and unfading glories of eternity. Thus he was supported and comforted amidst all that he now suffered, or could afterwards befall him. " As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

By the face of God, I understand God himself, or the divine character as made known by himself. To behold his face is to contemplate the divine character, and to enjoy the divine favour. This is enjoyed by the saints partly in this life ; but not

in that full and perfect manner of which David here speaks.

“ I will behold thy face in *righteousness*.” This may refer, either to the character of God and his favour, that the one shall be contemplated and the other enjoyed in a perfect consistency with all that is holy and righteous; or to the character of David, and of all those who shall be made partakers of this distinguished privilege, that they are righteous, for only “ the pure in heart shall see God.” The latter sense appears to me to be the most natural, for, according to the original, the arrangement is, and I can find no good reason why it should not have been preserved in the translation, “ I in righteousness will behold thy face.” As if David had said, “ I am convinced of the righteousness of my cause; though persecuted by my enemies I wish always to have in view the glory of God, and to be upright before him in all that I do; being fully persuaded that the righteous only shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of God.”

He looks forward, not only to death, when his soul shall be made perfect in righteousness and holiness, but to the resurrection of the body, when the happiness of his whole person shall be consummated. This is plain from the language here used, “ when I *awake*, I shall be satisfied with thy likeness.” The soul never sleeps, and therefore needs not to be awakened. The state of the bodies of the

saints, however, after death, is frequently compared to a sleep, and their resurrection to an awakening out of sleep. “They that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life *. I in righteousness will behold thy face: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”

In the illustration of this subject, I propose, *first*, to consider the happiness of the righteous in a future world, which is here the object of their faith and hope: And, *secondly*, the comfort which the believing prospect of it affords in a present life.

I. Let us consider the happiness of the righteous in a future life which is here the object of their faith and hope.

It merits special notice that it is the righteous only who either have a right to this happiness, or are fitted to enjoy it. “I in righteousness will behold thy face,” says the psalmist, referring to his character as different from that of the men of the world, whom he describes in the preceding verses.

What was David? He was “by nature a child of wrath even as others.” “He was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him †.” But by the grace of God he was justified and sanctified. The righteousness of the Messiah, who was to be cut off, but not for himself, was by God imputed to him, and therefore he had a right to this

* Dan. xii. 2.

† Psalm li. 5.

happiness: For “he describes the blessedness of the man,” and he describes what he knew from experience, “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity*.” And to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity he imputeth righteousness, a righteousness without any works of theirs, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This the Apostle Paul explains at large in his epistle to the Romans. David was not only justified freely by the grace, but he was also sanctified by the Spirit of God. He had his prayer answered, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me†.” The principles of righteousness and of holiness were implanted within him, by which he was qualified, in some measure, to enjoy the happiness which he had in prospect. Thus he delighted in the love and in the practice of righteousness. “I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.” “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies‡.”—This is a brief outline of the character of David, and of all those who shall enjoy happiness in a future life, which you should remember while I consider the happiness itself.

First, I observe, that this happiness consists in the contemplation of the divine character. “I will behold thy face,” plainly implies that God himself,

* Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. † Ps. li. 10. ‡ Ps. cxix. 59, 113.

or the divine character, shall be contemplated by the righteous in heaven. Whether the divine essence or substance shall be seen in heaven, is a question which I leave undecided, as too high for me, without staggering the faith, or impairing the comfort of the Christian. Although I am inclined to think that the Eternal, the Infinite Spirit, who fills immensity with his presence, cannot be the direct and immediate object of perception to any of his creatures, even in their most perfect state of existence, yet it is sufficient at present to admit, that the divine character will be revealed in heaven in the most glorious manner, and will be contemplated and admired by the saints, to their utmost satisfaction and delight.

Here God is to be seen in every object which strikes our view,—in the splendour of the heavens—in the beauty of the earth—in the expanse of the ocean. He is also to be seen in the dispensations of Providence, whether inviting or alarming; “for whoso is wise and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord*.” God is to be seen more clearly, and more fully in his word, and in the ordinances which he hath appointed in his church, for his power and his glory are to be seen, and have been seen, in the sanctuary.

* Psalm cvii. 43.

To the righteous, the grand object of contemplation shall be the same in heaven that it was on earth, the difference will be in the manner in which, or the medium through which, it is viewed. There God will be contemplated by the saints in every object which is presented before them. The works of his hands shall there proclaim, in the clearest and most impressive manner, the glory of his wisdom, of his power, of his holiness, of his truth, of his righteousness, of his goodness, of every perfection of his nature. He will be beheld in the material part of the creation, which shall be appropriated for the habitation of the saints, “in the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness,” in the many mansions of our Father’s house, which shall be fitted up, and prepared in such a style of elegance and splendour, as will most illustriously display the skill and power of the supreme Architect, and will be admirably suited to the dignity and felicity of all who dwell in them. He will be beheld in the intelligent and pure part of his creation, whom he hath appointed and prepared to reside in his presence. In the “innumerable company of angels” who shall surround his throne,—clothed with light,—flaming with love,—with the most profound reverence and humility, intense in the study of the mysteries of redemption,—burning with zeal for his honour,—ready to fly in the fulfilling of his word. In “the spirits of just men made perfect,”—in the many sons brought to glory, deeply

sensible of their guilt and unworthiness,—filled with admiration of the sovereignty and riches of divine grace,—wondering at the nature, the kind, the extent, the perfection, the perpetuity of the happiness conferred on them ; with hearts swelling with gratitude, and pouring forth the sweetest and noblest accents of praise to God and to the Lamb.

But, above all, God will be seen in heaven in his incarnate Son, as He appears “ in the midst of the throne as a Lamb that hath been slain.” This will be by far the most attractive object in heaven. The eyes of all the inhabitants will be directed to it, and fixed on it. God will be seen there in a manner in which he will not be seen any where else. All the rays of the divine perfections meet in Christ, and shine forth with a peculiar glory. Jehovah, as the God of salvation, will be contemplated as contriving the plan of redemption in Christ ; as accomplishing it by him ; as being well pleased with the righteousness of him who, for the sufferings of death is crowned with glory and honour. The redeemed of the Lord who shall return, and come to the Zion above with songs, will contemplate in Christ the sovereign love of God as the source of their ransom,—the previous sufferings and death of Christ as the price of it,—his present glory and felicity as the pattern of theirs, and as the pledge and security for their everlasting continuance. No wonder, therefore, that their song of praise is, “ Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our

sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Secondly, This happiness consists in the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of the divine love. Beholding the face of God is an expression which seems to denote more than the contemplation of the divine character, it also includes the enjoyment of the divine favour or love. Thus, when Jehovah threatens to visit his ancient people with the tokens of his displeasure, he says, "I will shew them the back, and not the face in the day of their calamity *." Absalom is said to have dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face †, that is, he enjoyed not the tokens of his love or the intimacies of his friendship.

The righteous are upon earth peculiarly interested in the divine favour. "Being justified by faith they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ they have access into the grace or favour in which they stand." But though they have seen the face of God in love, yet he does not always smile upon them. The light of his countenance is frequently withdrawn, so that they walk in darkness solitary and sad. But hereafter in heaven they shall see his face continually. It shall never wear a frown, and no cloud shall ever arise to interrupt the pleasing, the enrapturing view. All the

* Jer. xviii. 17.

† 2 Sam. xiv. 28.

children of the kingdom shall be supremely happy in the smiles and blessings of a Father in whose heart benevolence knows no bounds and no change, and whose hand is always powerful and ready to bestow whatever his heart inclines. They shall never lose sight of their interest in his favour. The streams of his goodness shall meet with no interruption, as they flow into the enlarged capacities of their souls. They shall rest in the full undecaying assurance of his everlasting love. “In his presence there is fulness of joy; at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Thirdly, This happiness consists in perfect conformity to the divine image. “I shall be satisfied with thy likeness.”

David, when he was in this world, is styled “a man after God’s own heart*.” However much this may describe him, in his official character, as a king or ruler in Israel, it equally belongs to him as a saint renewed in the spirit of his mind; for we find no such character given to a wicked man. Besides, the person who, from a sense of the divine authority, is conscientious in performing the public duties of office, will find the same reason for the performance of private and personal duties, of fulfilling all the will of God, as the Apostle Paul expresses it †.

To be “a man after God’s own heart,” therefore, is not peculiar to David. This honour has ^{we} all

* 1 Sam. 13. 14.

† Acts. xiii. 22.

the saints. All of them “are created after the image of God, in knowledge, in righteousness, and in holiness.” All have the law of God written in their hearts. This is the subject of their study, the source of their delight, the rule of their obedience. What God’s will is, for them to believe, to do, and to suffer, is their will. The divine mind, heart, or image, is at once the model and the standard of their character.

But though they are like unto God in having his image drawn upon their hearts, yet they are far from attaining perfect conformity unto it in this life. The remainder of ignorance and pollution which cleaves to them occasions much uneasiness. It is indeed the chief thing which distresses them, and causes them to pour forth their complaints in the bitterness of their souls, and to sigh after complete emancipation from the body of sin and death. Here they are not so like unto God as they ought to be, or as they would wish to be, but as perfect conformity to the divine image is the object of their desire, so it shall be their attainment in due time. At death their souls shall be made perfect in holiness. From their understandings every cloud shall be dispelled, from their hearts every stain shall be washed away. They shall be so like unto God, that not only no spot or blemish of corruption shall be seen on them, but they shall be placed beyond the very possibility of sinning.

What a just and pleasing idea of happiness does

this enable us to form ! Holiness is the grand principle of happiness. The absence of all sin easily and satisfactorily accounts for the absence of all misery. But where there is no positive misery, happiness may still be incomplete, in so far as additions may be made unto it. And this no doubt is true with respect to the saints who are in heaven, and those also who shall arrive there, while their bodies are left in the grave : All that constitutes human nature does not then enjoy the felicity to which it is destined. But the flesh rests in hope, and when it shall awake to the resurrection of life, there shall then be an accession to their glory and to their joy. To their glory, as their incorruptible bodies shall then be reunited to their souls ; to their joy, inasmuch as the perfection of their entire nature must afford greater pleasure than that of a part. At the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ to raise the dead and to judge the world, their likeness to God and to Christ shall be consummated. “ Beloved, now are ye the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what ye shall be, but ye know that when he shall appear ye shall be like him, for ye shall see him as he is.”

Fourthly, This happiness shall at last be full and complete. “ I shall be *satisfied* with thy likeness.”

The satisfaction of man may be said to consist in having objects fitted to employ all the powers and to gratify all the desires of his nature ;—those powers

and desires which were originally implanted in his constitution, which were perverted and debilitated by sin, but are renewed and restored by the grace of God.

Here many occurrences take place which prevent the righteous from enjoying that satisfaction after which they aspire. Their mind's eye is frequently weak and dim, so that they cannot see divine objects so clearly as they desire to see them. By the temptations of Satan, by the allurements of the world, by the operations of sin in them, their affections are often misplaced, or wandering after forbidden objects; their desires also, through remaining ignorance and unbelief, are often irregular; and therefore it is not surprising that here they meet with many disappointments. But hereafter they shall enjoy full satisfaction, arising from the contemplation of the divine character, the enjoyment of the divine love, and the possession of the divine likeness. There shall be no power of the understanding but will be employed with vigour and with pleasure on the most glorious objects. Every discovery will be made which shall afford the most exquisite delight, and no discovery will be withheld which shall occasion the smallest anxiety to obtain. The most pure and refined taste will be gratified with the admiring view of the sublime and the beautiful, of all that is good, amiable, and excellent, in their original perfection. The active powers will follow in the

train of the intellectual, and will be engaged in the noblest and most exalted services, in the worship of God and of the Lamb.

There will be no desire left unsatisfied ; none but will be gratified in the highest degree. The desire of seeing God face to face, and of being like him, will absorb all the rest. The objects of their faith and hope will then be completely realised. Imagination itself, even the imagination of the saints in heaven, will not be able to paint scenes more splendid than what they see, or their hearts to conceive more pure and exalted pleasures than what they enjoy. The wonderfully improved and expanded capacities of their souls, “ shall be filled with all the fulness of God.” Their desire after immortality shall also be completely gratified ; for their happiness shall be without interruption, and without end. “ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*.”

When the Christian arrives in heaven, he may adopt, with a little variation, the language of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon, in still higher strains : O God ! “ it was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts, and of thy wisdom,”

* Rev. vii. 16, 17.

of the glory and happiness of thy palace. “Howbeit, I believed not fully the words as I ought to have done, until I came, and mine eyes have seen it; and behold the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men; happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, that hear thy wisdom,” and behold thy face*.”

II. Let us now shortly consider the comfort which the believing prospect of this happiness affords to the righteous in a present life.

We find the words of the text uttered by David as a source of consolation to him amidst the temptations and afflictions to which he was exposed, and in the prospect of death and the grave.

1. The faith and hope of future happiness afford comfort to the righteous, as it is thus that the mind is fortified against envying the prosperity of the wicked.

There are some situations in which the men of the world are placed, which, to the eye of sense, are exceedingly desirable, and which present powerful temptations, even to the righteous themselves, to make them discontented with their own lot, and to envy that of others. Behold a man raised to the highest rank in the state, possessed of great riches, invested with extensive power and influence, faring sumptuously every day, having a splendid train of

* 1 Kings x. 6, 7, 8.

servants, a numerous and flourishing family, and the fair prospect of transmitting his name, with honourable distinction, to distant ages. Such a scene as this may engage the fancy, and excite envy in the breasts of those whose views are bounded by this vain and transitory world ; but the righteous, who believe in a future state of existence, and rejoice in the hope of future happiness, instead of envying, pity the man who knows no better, and therefore who knows not what true happiness is. This was the temper of mind which David displayed on this occasion. And what were all the prophets, apostles, and disciples of the Lord Jesus, who suffered martyrdom in the cause of Christ ? They did not envy the power, splendour, or prosperity, with which their persecutors were clothed, but were happy in the prospect of escaping from their hands, to receive “ a crown of glory which fadeth not away.”

2. The believing prospect of future happiness affords comfort to the righteous amidst all the sufferings of a present life. David, when he uttered the words of the text, was in a situation of great distress. He was a wanderer in a wilderness ; his dependants had forsaken him ; his friends had become ungrateful ; his subjects rebellious ; enemies had risen up against him on every side ;—he was enduring open and violent persecution from those who had thirsted for his blood, but he had, in the faith and hope of future blessedness, a joy with which a stranger does

not intermeddle. Amidst all the afflictions, ye saints of the Most High, with which you are visited, this also will afford you comfort. You may be exposed to bodily trouble,—to mental anxiety,—to the loss of property, of friends, of relatives,—to the loss of reputation by malicious tongues,—to the loss of liberty by lawless power: but whatever may be your lot in this vale of tears, an overflowing source of consolation remains, a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. These afflictions are of short duration, and shall have a glorious issue. “For your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And when affliction is properly improved, it will lead you the more eagerly to contemplate and to desire the better country, which is an heavenly, as night, which hides the earth, reveals the sky.

3. The believing prospect of future happiness affords consolation to the righteous in the view of death and the grave. There is something sad and awful strikes us in looking forward to the termination of our journey in this world. Then we leave the scenes of active usefulness and pleasure in doing good to man. We bid farewell to our friends and relatives, who have been our fellow travellers, who are anxious we should remain with them a little longer, but are left behind to mourn their loss. We part with our bodies to be consigned to the silent

grave, to moulder into dust: And the soul goes to visit invisible regions, never to return. But the true Christian finds a sufficient antidote against all that is fearful and revolting in death and the grave. He believes "that the righteous have hope in their death, that death is gain to them, for then they depart to be with Christ, which is far better," that it is the appointed means of finishing their course of labour and of suffering, and of crowning their joys,—that then their bodies sleep in the dust till the resurrection, when they shall be awakened glorious and immortal, like the glorious body of Christ. Having such views, they can say, "Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil: for thou art with us; thy rod and thy staff they comfort us." Having such hopes, death, instead of being an object of aversion, becomes an object of desire. "Willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

This subject teaches us how thankful we ought to be to God for the gospel, which brings life and immortality to light. The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state of happiness, are important doctrines, for the confirmation of which we must depend on divine revelation alone. By the light of nature they are suggested, by a more sure word of prophecy they are established. To the Old Testament church they were revealed as well as to the New, but to us they are illustrated in

a more clear and distinct manner ; and as our privileges are greater our attainments ought to be greater also. But, alas ! how few among us can say with David, “ as for me, O Lord, in righteousness I shall behold thy face.” If we would reach this high attainment, let us make daily use of the word of God ; let us search it with attention, and improve it by faith, that we may find it to be a source of consolation to us at all times, that we may be enabled to say, “ thy statutes, O God, have been our song in this house of our pilgrimage.” With the staff of the promise in the hand of faith, let us go on our way rejoicing.

This subject also teaches us, that death makes no radical change on the character, on the exercises, or on the enjoyments of the righteous. These are only improved and perfected at death. The righteous then are righteous still—their exercise here was spiritual contemplation—their enjoyment here was the enjoyment of God as their portion, and hereafter they shall see God, and enjoy him for ever. Heaven, though a region unseen, is not unknown to the righteous. In faith, in hope, in holy desire, they have frequently gone thither. Before they actually arrive there they are acquainted with the character of the inhabitants, with the nature of their employments, and of their pleasures. What say you, Christians, to this ? Does not this exactly accord with your experience ? Did you not this very day see the power and glory of God in the sanctuary ?

Had you not a glimpse of the promised land? Did you not “see the King in his beauty, and the land which is afar off? When sitting at the table of your Lord and Saviour, had you not a foretaste of the joys of immortality? Could you not say, when you had fellowship with one another in that sacred ordinance, “truly also our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?” What was this but the happiness of heaven upon earth, but to taste the pleasures of eternity in the moments of time? And let all of you be instructed, that if you would be happy hereafter, you must, in the present life, be prepared to enjoy true felicity.

Seriously consider who has a right to the happiness of a future world, and who shall at last enjoy it. Those only who have a right in the sight of God to the holy ordinance of the supper, which we have been this day observing, have a right to heaven; for such are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, such are prepared for heaven, for they are renewed in the spirit of their minds. Those of you, therefore, who have been worthy communicants this day, those of you who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, those of you who are fully assured, on sufficient grounds, of your interest in the divine favour, and who can say, each for himself, “as for me, in righteousness I will behold thy face, O God: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,” those of you shall have your happiness consummated in due time. But who among us can say this? I trust

some can, though it is probable the number be small. But what is it *you* can say? Once indeed we enjoyed such triumphs of faith and of hope, but it is not now with us as in months past. Our prospects are clouded, and we go mourning without the sun. Are you mourning over a sense of sin, as the cause of the Lord's withdrawing from you the light of his countenance? Are you fervent in prayer, that the Lord would revive you again, that you may rejoice in him? Are you resolved to seek him till you find him? and though you are in doubt of your love to him, yet while you firmly believe his wonderful love to sinners, you can have no doubt of your being grieved that you love him so little, and of your being desirous to love him more? then we congratulate you as the "blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who shall be filled." But some one may be saying, I cannot affirm much of my comfortable experience in religion, it has been so changeable and so deceitful, but I am now not so anxious about sensible comfort to my soul, as about firmly believing the promise of a faithful God. I am now brought humbly to depend on the grace of God for the supply of all my wants, on the righteousness of Christ as the foundation of my acceptance with God, and thankfully to taste of the goodness of his house, as he is pleased, in the sovereignty of his wisdom, to dispense it unto me, convinced that the least crumb is more than what I deserve. Then I hail you as "the righteous who

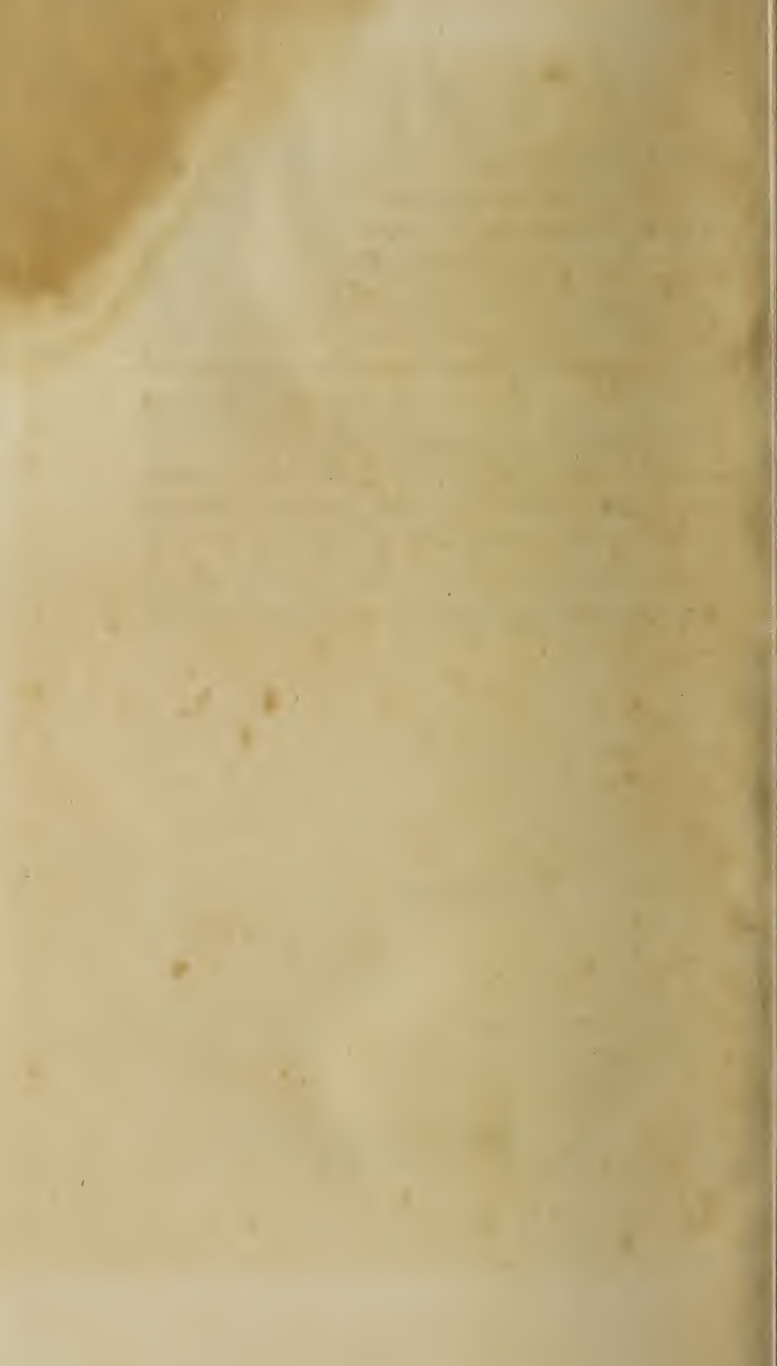
shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father ;” and the way which you have chosen is the very way in which you can expect to make the most rapid progress in the divine life, and to rise to the highest assurances of the divine love ; for they that thus “ wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”

But what shall we say to those whose portion is in the present life ? Your cry is, what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed ? Your great concern is about your bodies, and things temporal ; but your immortal souls, things spiritual and eternal, give you little or no concern. Your views are bounded by this little narrow scene, which passeth away. You never once cherish the thought of eternity. It is here you wish always to remain. You never seem to smile but when the sun of prosperity shines upon you ; and when the storm of adversity beats upon your defenceless heads, you are miserable, for you are deprived of every source of consolation. But what is your happiness, even in your best days—when your coffers are most filled with hidden treasure—when your business is most flourishing and successful—when your family is most numerous and most promising ? What is all this happiness ? It hath nothing but the name ; it has no substance. It is a shadow which passeth away. In the hour of affliction, in the hour of death, it is fled,

and leaves nothing behind but the reality of disappointment, and the bitterness of sorrow. Be convinced, O worldly man, of your vanity and folly ! Consider that death is certain—that your soul is immortal—that eternity is awful. O look to Christ by faith, who is the only Saviour and Redeemer, who delivers from this present evil world, delivers from sin, from the wrath to come. “ Deliver me, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

THE END.

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